In Pursuit of the Hero: Mythological Heroic Structures in J.K Rowling’s Harry Potter Series

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Abstract

Criticism of J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter series has maintained that its popularity stems from a well-marketed, repetitive and simple structure. However, this essay considers that this success derives from recognizable mythological heroic structures. The essay traces the protagonist’s development from the perspective of two different theories that contrast and complement each other in various ways, Otto Rank’s theory of the myth of the birth of the hero and Joseph Campbell’s theory of the monomyth. Campbell and Rank both hypothesize that hero myths are repetitive because they emerge from the subconscious of human kind. It can be seen in the tracing of the heroic development in Harry Potter that—although various aspects and features in the hero’s journey are followed in the narrative — the series does not strictly fit these theories. The result is a combination of different features from both theories, which modernizes the heroic myth that has pervaded human culture and history since time immemorial.

Keywords: Campbell; Harry Potter; Heroic Structures; Monomyth; Mythology; Rank
Since time immemorial, heroic figures have been a source of inspiration and fascination for mankind. The themes and motifs of the heroic myths have recurred consistently in different narratives, which seem to suggest that heroic myths are imbedded in our culture and history. In J.K. Rowling’s series about the wizard-boy Harry Potter, we find the same themes, motifs and structures of the hero myth in a narrative written for younger readers but which appeals to readers of all ages.

One of the more vehement critics of the Harry Potter series, Jack Zipes, contends that the Harry Potter novels are “easy and delightful and carefully manicured and packaged, and they sell extraordinarily well because they are so cute and ordinary.” Zipes continues by claiming: “if you read one, you’ve read them all: the plots are the same…the story lines become tedious and grating after you have read the first” (175). It must be noted that Zipes writes about Harry Potter after the first four books. Therefore, he generalizes about a recurring plot without being able to substantiate his claim to all seven novels. Furthermore, his comments that the novels sell well because they are easy and ordinary, disrespectfully suggest that the audience is unintelligent and ready to lap up any well-marketed concoction. However, I would argue that the financial success in the bookstores should be disregarded when the interesting objective of an investigation is to find the reason of the universal appeal of this narrative.

Instead, the appeal of the series brings us back to the everlasting fascination with heroic figures in human culture. The Harry Potter series is strongly centred in the protagonist, whose name appears in the title of each volume (as is typical in literature
for younger readers), and the narrative is almost exclusively focalized through him. Consequently, this omnipresence of the protagonist suggests that the fundamental appeal to both young and adult readers lies in Harry Potter himself. Furthermore, because the concept of heroism has pervaded human culture for as long as literature itself has existed, heroes and heroic mythologies have been carefully explored by among others psychoanalysts and mythologists. Two very relevant theories about structures in hero myths will be discussed in this essay, psychoanalyst Otto Rank’s theory of the myth of the birth of the hero and mythologist Joseph Campbell’s theory of the “monomyth”. More specifically, I would argue that the success of the Harry Potter series stems from an amalgamation of different features and stages from these mythological heroic structures, which satisfy and comfort both the child and adult reader. Therefore, the objective of this essay is, first, to show this combination of heroic features and stages from fundamental mythological structures that create such an appealing narrative, and second, to discuss how the narrative satisfies and comforts the reader.

Hero Myths, Dreams and Structure

Dudley Jones and Tony Watkins quote Carl Gustav Jung’s argument that the hero myths “are transcultural and transhistorical because they emerge from the collective unconscious” (7). Similarly, Campbell, as a follower of Jung, contends that “myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation” (3). Furthermore, Rank, one of Sigmund Freud’s apostles, deems myth as “disguised, symbolic fulfilment of repressed, overwhelmingly Oedipal wishes lingering in the adult” reader (Segal, viii). What can be inferred from these psychological concepts is that myth—and more specifically, the hero myth—has and will always pervade human culture and history. These “inexhaustible energies” are our own “repressed” wishes for a hero to come along and do something to heal an endangered world. Furthermore, these “Oedipal wishes” are our wishes that through the hero myth we can find at least some of the freedom that is withheld from us in our childhood. In addition, both Campbell and Rank stress the importance and relation between dreams and myth. They both agree with Freud’s assertion that our dreams are a manifestation of the fulfilment of our own childhood wishes. The human imagination is then the “ultimate source of all myths” (Rank 6-7).
Ultimately, both Rank and Campbell see that there is a strong relationship between the private dream and the public myth as expressions of a common cultural content.

As a result of Campbell’s extensive studies in myth and religion, he concludes that although hero myths vary in detail, structurally they are very similar. Campbell calls this theory the “monomyth” and he explores it in his work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. He claims there that “the standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation [departure]—initiation—return”, which means that the hero’s development consists of three major sections or phases. The first major phase is separation or departure where the hero begins his journey from the “world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder”. The following phase is initiation where the hero encounters “fabulous forces” in the form of numerous trials and ordeals. This phase ends with the hero’s “decisive victory”. The last phase is called return, and in this phase the hero starts his journey home from his “mysterious adventure” bringing with him the boon he has secured on his journey to bestow it “on his fellow men” (Campbell, 28).

Similarly, Rank analyses hero myths from societies around the Mediterranean Sea, from Mesopotamia and from India. Hero myths like those of Oedipus, Hercules, Remus and Romulus, the Persian hero Cyrus and the Indian hero Karna among many others are analysed in detail in his work *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*. Like Campbell, Rank contends that most heroic myths share certain features. He outlines these similarities:

The hero is the child of most distinguished parents…His origin is preceded by difficulties…During or before the pregnancy, there is a prophecy, in the form of a dream or oracle…usually threatening danger to the father (or his representative)…As a rule he is surrendered … in a box. He is then saved by animals, or by lowly people…after he has grown up, he finds his distinguished parents, in a highly versatile fashion. He takes his revenge on his father, on the one hand, and is acknowledged, on the other. Finally he achieves rank and honors. (57)

In Rank’s outline of the hero’s development, in addition to the suggestive titling of his work, we can see that events around and even before the birth of the hero are the foci of his analysis. Robert Segal discusses the same distinction in the introduction to *In Quest of the Hero*; in his discussion of Campbell’s and Rank’s schemes he argues that Rank’s pattern is “limited to the first half of life” while Campbell’s in contrast, “involves the second half even more” (xvi).
In previous research in this area, in “Harry Potter – A Return to the Romantic Hero”, Maria Nikolajeva “deems it legitimate and fruitful” to apply Campbell’s theory of the monomyth, because the movement of separation-initiation-return “corresponds to the master plot of children’s fiction, home-away-homecoming” (126). In contrast to Nikolajeva’s article where Campbell’s monomyth is discussed, Katherine Grimes discusses Rank’s theory of the myth of the birth of the hero (in her article “Harry Potter. Fairy Tale Prince, Real Boy and Archetypical Hero”). However, some of their claims can be questioned; for example, Nikolajeva does not fully follow Campbell’s pattern throughout its various stages, but instead discusses the role of the mythical hero and how it affects the reader. Grimes, in contrast, follows Rank’s scheme but due to the whole of the series not being completed at the time she wrote the article, she was unable to trace all of Rank’s scheme. However, like Nikolajeva, she also discusses how Rank’s mythical hero affects the reader. There seems to be a gap in the previous research which this essay aims to fulfil. The essay will therefore aim to discuss both patterns and later discuss these essays’ arguments concerning the impact of the mythical patterns on the reader.

Furthermore, Segal continues with arguing that Rank’s structure “begins with the hero’s birth; Campbell’s, with his adventure”. Where Rank’s pattern ends with “the adult hero ensconced at home”, Campbell’s structure begins (xvii). In the Harry Potter series, however, important features such as the prophecy from Rank’s pattern are introduced into the latter part of the series. Therefore, Rank’s scheme does not end before Campbell’s begin. Rather, Rank’s scheme overlaps with Campbell’s structure, at least in the Harry Potter series. Because features in Rank’s pattern occur before the birth of the hero, there needs to be some form of exposition. Rowling ingeniously utilizes a magical object, the “pensieve” into which memories that are siphoned from certain characters’ minds can be poured and examined (The Goblet of Fire 519). This object serves as a device for exposition of events common in Rank’s scheme which occur before the birth of the hero. Moreover, Campbell’s patterns of the “rites of passage: separation—initiation—return” can be applied to all seven novels individually. However, I will treat all seven novels as an entity and follow the development of the hero throughout all seven narratives while incorporating Rank’s pattern where it is apparent.
Separation [Departure]

In Rank’s scheme, which begins before Campbell’s, the hero is separated from his parents soon after his birth and “surrendered…in a box” (57). In the first chapter of *Harry Potter and Philosopher’s Stone*, Harry is similarly left in a “bundle of blankets” (24) to “lowly people”; in this case the lowly people are Harry’s only remaining relatives the Dursleys: his aunt Petunia, his uncle Vernon and his cousin Dudley. Their lowliness is represented by their ordinariness. The Dursleys are also important in Harry’s development with regards to Rank’s heroic pattern and his discussion of the importance of neglect in the protagonist’s heroic development. Rank states that “opportunities arise only too frequently when the child is neglected, or…when he misses the entire love of the parents” (60). By introducing the characters of the Dursleys, Rowling presents a picture of a tragic, innocent fairy-tale protagonist, such as Cinderella, in Harry who is inherently good despite the maltreatment he suffers.

Mary Pharr emphasises another aspect of the Dursleys’ treatment of Harry when she argues that “by abusing Harry, [The Dursley family] makes him identify with the abused” (57). By abusing Harry, the Dursleys make him understand what kind of position petty cruelty and suppression can put people in. For example, Harry recognizes the same superiority and cruelty in Draco Malfoy on the train to Hogwarts and, consequently, he declines Draco’s offer of friendship (*Philosopher’s Stone* 120).

In Harry’s subsequent heroic development, Campbell’s hero pattern can be perceived as beginning. According to Campbell, the first phase, the separation or departure, consists of five stages. The hero receives a “call to adventure,” sometimes in the form of a “blunder” that “reveals an unsuspected world,” or through the appearance of a “herald” from that world—usually some shadowy, veiled, mysterious figure, or someone “dark, loathly, or terrifying, judged evil by the world”—who may literally call the hero “to live…or…to die” (46-48). Both the blunder and the appearance of a herald are signs that are apparent in *The Philosopher’s Stone*. The blunder that reveals the unsuspected world of magic is the letter that is sent to Harry. The blunder which occurs, “apparently by the merest chance” (Campbell 46), is Harry’s own belief that the letter must be some form of mistake because “no one, ever, in his whole life, had written to him. Who would?” (42). Interestingly, in *The Philosopher’s Stone*, the second stage in Campbell’s departure phase, the refusal of
the call, takes place before the herald makes his appearance. The refusal of the call which typically comes from the hero is reversed here. In this case the refusal can be inferred as the reaction of the Dursleys, who destroy the reappearing letters and drive away from the house. Although Harry does not know that the letter contains the promise of adventure, the transposition of Campbell’s structure creates suspense and curiosity.

However, the call to adventure cannot be prevented and the herald makes his appearance. The herald in the Harry Potter series is Rubeus Hagrid and we can see by his entrance and description that he fits the model of the herald: “A giant of a man was standing in the doorway. His face was almost completely hidden by a long shaggy mane of hair and a wild, tangled beard, but you could make out his eyes, glinting like black beetles under his hair” (55). Hagrid’s description fits the model of the herald, with a dark physical stature that could be deemed evil. The proposal of “to live…or…to die” that the mythical herald offers is represented by the choice of going to Hogwarts where he will experience friendship, happiness and nurture, or the choice “to die”, which is to stay with the Dursleys and keep living in the same detestable neglect and abusive environment that he has lived with for ten years.

After receiving the Call, the monomythic hero acquires “supernatural aid” from “a protective figure (often a little old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets”. The hero can rest assured, when danger looms, he “has only to know and trust, and the ageless guardians will appear” (Campbell, 63-66). In Harry’s adventure, the magical “amulets” are his wand and invisibility cloak. His wand is provided by the wand maker Mr Ollivander, who is described “as an old man,” while Albus Dumbledore, the “tall, thin and very old” headmaster of Hogwarts gives Harry an invisibility cloak (the Philosopher’s Stone 93,15,322). In addition, in The Deathly Hallows, Harry encounters two other magical objects, the Resurrection stone which holds “the power to bring back the dead” and the Elder wand which is “more powerful than any [wand] in existence” (331). Harry receives the Resurrection stone through Dumbledore’s will and the Elder wand he wins in a battle.

According to Campbell, the hero next crosses the undetectable threshold that normal people are “more than content”, even proud, to avoid seeing. This threshold hides an unknown world that leads to a sphere of rebirth and may be defended by a protective guardian and/or a destructive watchman (71). There are many thresholds that Harry has to cross to step into the unknown magical world. The Leaky Cauldron
and Platform Nine and Three-Quarters are thresholds to Diagon Alley and the Hogwarts Express. There are also other and less frequented thresholds that hide an unknown world. A department store hides St Mungo’s Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries and underground public toilets are portals into the Ministry of Magic. While all of these thresholds are not indefinitely defended by a “guardian”, in the second novel, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, the threshold at Platform Nine and Three-Quarters is sealed by the house-elf Dobby (112). The fact that all of these thresholds cannot be seen by normal people suggests that the defence mechanisms of these thresholds are ignorance. Knowledge of how to reach these thresholds has to be acquired by Harry in order to pass through them.

In the departure phase’s final stage the hero—“instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold”—“is swallowed” in “the belly of the whale.” “The hero goes inward, to be born again” (Campbell, 83). This may mean that the hero dies and is born again. In Harry’s heroic adventure it does not necessarily mean really dying, it is more symbolical. By passing thresholds into the unknown magical world, Harry shrugs off his commonness in the Muggle (non-magic) world and embraces his uniqueness, thereby being reborn as a new person.

As we can see, most of the stages in Campbell’s first phase are fulfilled in the Harry Potter series. More interestingly, when Harry receives the call from the herald, we can see the over-lapping of the two structures, since a few more of Rank’s features are revealed to the protagonist. Harry is the “child of distinguished parents”; in this case his father is a wizard and his mother a witch. Moreover, Harry gets to know that his “origin is proceeded by difficulties” when it is revealed that the main antagonist of the series, Lord Voldemort, tried to kill him as a baby (*The Philosopher’s Stone* 64-65).

Furthermore, it can be seen that, Campbell’s structure and first phase is not strictly adhered to when the refusal of the call occurs before the arrival of the herald. Campbell defines the refusal as “refusal to give up what one takes to be one’s own interest” (55). Therefore, the Dursleys’ fear of anything strange and mysterious and their unwillingness for Harry to partake in anything mysterious and strange could be deemed as a refusal of the call. The hero who usually is the one that hesitates in accepting the call is ignorant of the call. As a result, the narrative becomes suspenseful when both the reader and the protagonist are ignorant of the call to adventure. Moreover, we can see that the two theories complement each other well at
certain stages. For example, neglect and lack of love which are important in Rank’s hero pattern makes the hero especially susceptible to the call to adventure in Campbell’s structure.

Deborah De Rosa also stresses the effect that neglect has on the hero’s inclination for escape and adventure. In her discussion of the safe home and the threatening unknown environment, she convincingly argues that “Rowling prevents ‘boredom’ by upsetting expected elements in the initiation paradigm”. De Rosa continues that “Rowling inverts the traditional paradigm” of the initiate leaving the safe home for the unknown and threatening environment (163-65), Harry departures from the hostility and neglectful life with the Dursleys to the contrasting nurture and safety in the unknown wizarding world. Granted, the wizarding world contains its own dangers, however, Harry does not suffer from the malnutrition and ostracism of the unsafe Dursley household.

Initiation

The first stage in the “monomyth’s” initiation phase is “the road of trials,” a series of tests in which the hero is assisted by the advice or agents of those who have offered supernatural aid, by the talismans given him, or by a “benign power everywhere supporting him” (Campbell 89). This stage fits the Harry Potter series best because the hero is faced with a series of tests and ordeals in each novel throughout the series which he overcomes by using the magical items or advice given to him by supernatural helpers. Dumbledore serves as Harry’s mentor throughout the series, providing advice and help. Harry’s friends, Ron and Hermione, can also be deemed to be helpers to the hero. Ron and Hermione provide Harry with certain abilities that he does not possess when they have to overcome obstacles to reach their goal. Hermione provides intelligence, learning and logic, while Ron is the traditional sidekick and brother-in-arms to the hero. Neville and Luna are two other characters—although quirky—who remain faithfully by Harry’s side and give surprising aid at crucial times.

The hero might also encounter a goddess, a temptress, or both. We can see here again the flexibility of Campbell’s pattern in the Harry Potter series when this stage actually takes place in the epilogue to the last novel, The Deathly Hallows, where we find out that Harry is married to Ginny. While Ginny is not really a
“goddess”, she is the princess that is saved by the hero, a fact that is shown in the second volume of the Harry Potter series, when Harry saves Ginny from Voldemort. Harry is rewarded with marrying the princess, after all “the barriers and ogres have been overcome”. According to Campbell, the marriage fulfils “the hero’s total mastery of life; for the woman is life, the hero its knower and master” (Campbell, 100, 111). The “barriers and ogres” represent various obstacles that hinder Harry’s search for happiness. Ginny represents Harry’s completion as a hero. He has found the “barriers and ogres” in his life and has overcome them.

After the encounter with the goddess or temptress, atonement with the father or father figure is sought. The father figure is represented as “the initiating priest through whom the young being passes on into the larger world” (Campbell, 125). While there are many father-figures in Harry’s life (his uncle Vernon, his Godfather Sirius Black, his school teacher Remus Lupin) only Dumbledore is present throughout all seven narratives and he is the one who could be viewed as the initiating priest through whom the protagonist “passes on into the larger world”. Dumbledore embodies the omniscient character that possesses knowledge that the protagonist seeks but will not acquire until he has proven himself.

We can see signs of Dumbledore’s influence on Harry’s life very early in the series. In The Philosopher’s Stone Dumbledore places Harry with the Dursleys because the fame of defeating Voldemort would: “be enough to turn any boy’s head…Can’t you see how much better off he’ll be, growing up away from all [the fame] until he’s ready to take it?” (20). While we find out later in the Order of the Phoenix that Harry is also magically protected from Voldemort as long as he remains in the care of the Dursleys (737), it is safe to suggest that Dumbledore in his omniscience believes that living in ignorance in a non-magical world, Harry is distanced from all praise that could make him arrogant.

Furthermore, it is interesting to see that Harry does not seem to want to confront his father figure or the influence he wields over Harry’s life. For example, in The Philosopher’s Stone, after his “trial”, Harry asks why Voldemort attempted to kill him: “why would [Voldemort] want to kill” me in the first place?” to which Dumbledore answers: “I cannot tell you. Not today. Not now. You will know, one day… And Harry knew it would be no good to argue” (321). Very early, Harry demonstrates a lack of curiosity and agency by not pursuing the answer to his question. Even though Harry at other times acts and explores forbidden questions and
places without the approval of Dumbledore in almost every volume, ultimately, only Dumbledore as “the initiating priest” decides how and when Harry passes on “into the larger world”. Eventually, Harry does progress from his lethargic role in his relationship with Dumbledore. The demise of Harry’s godfather Sirius in *The Order of the Phoenix* which Harry feels responsible for is the incident that sparks Harry’s revolt against Dumbledore (726-27). Harry’s sense of guilt in the loss of “the closest thing to a parent” he has ever known, is the last factor that convinces Dumbledore “that [Harry] is ready for the knowledge [Dumbledore has] kept from [him] for so long” and that Harry has “proved that [Dumbledore] should have placed the burden upon [Harry] before this [time]” (*The Order of the Phoenix* 738-39).

Despite the confidence shown by Dumbledore in Harry, the influence and guidance in Harry’s quest are still apparent even after Dumbledore’s death in the end of *The Half-Blood Prince*. The influence on Harry continues when Harry finds out in the end of the ultimate novel *The Deathly Hallows* that he was helped by Snape on Dumbledore’s orders. As a result of Dumbledore’s influence on Harry’s life, atonement is reversed in the Harry Potter series. In Harry’s eerie meeting with Dumbledore in the “after-life” in *The Deathly Hallows*, it is Dumbledore who asks for Harry’s forgiveness and understanding for the manipulation that has led to Harry’s death (571).

While the hero of Campbell’s monomyth strives for atonement with a father figure, Rank’s hero pattern—which is heavily influenced by his discipleship to Freud—has many oedipal tendencies: “the hero takes his revenge on his father, on the one hand, and is acknowledged, on the other” (57). The father in Rank’s structure does not have to be the protagonist’s father. Because Harry is an orphan, the oedipal characteristics are represented by a tyrant, in this case Voldemort. For example, we can see in *The Philosopher’s Stone* with the herald’s appearance that an opposition is set between Voldemort and Harry, when Hagrid tells him that Voldemort killed Harry’s parents. Furthermore, Hagrid voices his scepticism that “[Voldemort] is still out there somewhere but lost his powers” (65-67); not only is a possible return suggested but also a confrontation with the father figure.

Moreover, in *The Half-Blood Prince*, we can see in Voldemort’s and Harry’s similarities, that their oedipal relation is further intensified. They are both orphans that grow up in non-magical communities. They both see Hogwarts not only as an escape out of misery but also as their home. Furthermore, the manner in which they receive
the information of their aptitude for magic intensifies their natural proclivity for good vs. evil. Harry is surprised, incredulous but curious. In contrast, Voldemort expresses excitement: “I can make bad things happen to people that annoy me…I knew I was different…I knew I was special” (254). However, they also differ in other ways: while Harry is ignorant of any magical gifts, Voldemort’s powers are “surprisingly well-developed for such a young wizard” and he is already “using magic against other people, to frighten, to punish, to control” (258-259). Furthermore, earlier in the series, in *The Goblet of Fire*, we find out that Harry’s and Voldemort’s wands are twins through their same core and in the final volume we find out that they share the same ancestors in the Peverell brothers. All of these similarities strengthen their connection. However, the journey into Voldemort’s past is important to the hero because it also enables him firstly, to understand how he can defeat the tyrant in the ultimate confrontation and secondly, to differentiate himself from the evil that Voldemort embodies.

In this stage of Campbell’s structure, a feature that characterizes Rank’s hero pattern, the prophecy, is revealed with help of the pensieve in *The Order of the Phoenix*: “The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches…the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have the power the Dark Lord knows not…and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives” (741, original italics). Although the characteristic of a prophecy is the definitiveness of the outcome, they are also vague. For example the prophecy in the Oedipus tale tells that King Laius of Thebes will be killed by his son (Oedipus). Laius abandons his son in the river but the son is saved and is raised in Corinth by King Polybus. When Oedipus receives the prophecy that he will kill his father and marry his mother, he flees Corinth in the belief that the prophecy refers to his foster parents. But, he unwittingly kills his father Laius on the way and after saving Thebes, he is given the hand of the queen, his mother, therefore fulfilling the prophecy (Rank 17). While the prophecy in the Oedipus tale is definitive we can see that the prophecy in the Harry Potter series is more ambiguous since it is unclear who “must die at the hand of the other”. Furthermore, the journey of the protagonist is prolonged when the prophecy reveals that he possesses a “power the Dark Lord knows not”. Harry must discover this innate power in order to defeat his adversary.

The penultimate stage of Campbell’s initiation phase is the hero’s apotheosis, which is literally a transcendence of one’s humanity to become godlike (Campbell
Harry reaches his apotheosis when he learns that “[he] must die” because a “part of Voldemort lives inside [him]” (*The Deathly Hallows* 551). Love and sacrifice are both religious motifs that serve an important role the Harry Potter series. It is seen when Harry’s mother sacrifices herself out of her love for Harry which gives him a permanent shield. The same sacrificial motif can be seen in the final novel, when Harry performs the last heroic and selfless act of sacrificing himself, just like his mother did: “I’ve done what my mother did. They’re protected from you” (591). In his consequent sacrifice, Harry transcends to the after-life and returns, fulfilling his apotheosis.

The initiation phase’s final stage is the receiving the ultimate boon, which could be the elixir of life or the God-like power of Zeus and Buddha (Campbell 168). The ultimate boon in the Harry Potter series helps Harry defeat Voldemort in the knowledge that he is “the true master of death” who “accepts that he must die, and understands that there are far, far worse things in the living world than dying” (*The Deathly Hallows* 377). The outcome of this knowledge leads to Voldemort’s defeat, which consequently leads to peace which is bestowed “on his fellow men”.

The pattern, where most of the stages in Campbell’s initiation phase are fulfilled while features from Rank’s hero pattern are apparent, is still in effect. Moreover, it should be noted that Rank’s features create suspense in the plot by prolonging the hero’s adventure and creating new twists and turns. The prophecy is an example where the plot gets a new twist when the hero has to face a life-threatening confrontation with his nemesis. By making her prophecy ambiguous in the outcome of the demise of either Harry or Voldemort, Rowling forces her protagonist to discover any weaknesses in the antagonist before the last altercation.

Most importantly, in the initiation phase we can see the importance of Rowling’s use of doubling and dualities in the Harry Potter series. The series is full of dualities, as we can see for example in the relationship between the caring and nurturing Weasleys as opposed to the abusing and neglecting Dursleys. Not only do these dualities create a clear distinction between good and bad for the reader, but they also affect Harry in his heroic development as described in Rank’s hero scheme. Since Rank’s scheme is so focused on oedipal tendencies with the son replacing the father, it becomes difficult to interpret Harry Potter from an oedipal reading. However, I would argue that Rowling’s use of dualities helps solve this problem. The revenge on the father is solved in the antagonism between Harry and Voldemort, Harry’s revenge
is towards the tyrant (Voldemort) that murdered his parents. The marriage to Ginny Weasley represents Harry's completion in the replacement of the father. By marrying Ginny, Harry acquires the same family that he lost as a child, the family where Harry acquires female nurture and motherly caring with the Weasleys but is deprived of in the care of the Dursleys.

Return

The third and last phase, Campbell’s return phase, consists of six stages or possible aspects of the hero’s return after accomplishing his feat. The hero could refuse to return or to give the boon to civilization. His homecoming could involve a “magic flight” that might be opposed or furthered by “magical” means, the hero’s attempt to return could end in disappointment, or he could be rescued from outside the unknown world. On returning, the hero may become the “master of the two worlds,” which involves attaining the ability to pass easily between them, and he might attain the “freedom to live,” to work in the known world without anxiety (Campbell 179-221).

Harry does not have any difficulties with the return phase in the conclusion of the series in what is understood from the epilogue in the Deathly Hallows. The “anxiety” that he displays at the ending of each of the preceding volumes when he has to return to the Dursleys is gone. In this epilogue he is happily married to Ginny and has three children. He is the “master of the two worlds,” since he does not have any difficulties with passing through the different worlds, a fact that is shown when he accompanies his own children through the same barrier to Platform Nine and Three-Quarters that he passed through in his heroic journey. Moreover, another sign of “anxiety” that is represented by the link with Voldemort is severed when Rowling concludes her narrative with stating that “The scar had not pained Harry for nineteen years. All was well” (604-07).

All of the stages in Campbell’s last phase are not fulfilled. Because most of the stages involve reluctance on the part of the hero to return to the known world, a solution is needed for this conundrum. The solution is an amalgam where Rowling creates a balance between the magical world and the ordinary when Harry acquires the nurturing and loving home with his new family that he was deprived of as a child, while he still has access—as any other wizard and witch—to the wonders of the magical unknown world.
Modernization and Value of Myth

As the hero’s journey finishes, a discussion about the value of these mythological structures is relevant. First of all, Rowling’s own literary abilities should be mentioned and praised. What makes Harry such an appealing character is Rowling’s ability to evoke sympathy in the reader in her depiction of Harry as the tragic, ill-treated but still humble boy. Furthermore, Rowling satisfies the desires of both the reader and the protagonist when she reveals the protagonist’s uniqueness in the call to adventure. In this revelation, she translocates the protagonist to an awe-inspiring environment where Harry “grapples with his life-altering lessons about personal identity” (De Rosa, 164). These “life-altering lessons” are provided by his friends and his mentors. For example, In the Chamber of Secrets, when Harry is dismayed about his similarities with Voldemort, Dumbledore teaches him that “our choices…show what we truly are, far more than abilities” (416). Harry understands the important lessons that our actions speak louder than words.

Moreover, in her depiction of the protagonist, Rowling defies the stereotypical characteristics of the hero; the immortal, invulnerable Adonis bulging with muscles and with great battle prowess. Harry is bespectacled, small and skinny with knobbly knees and unruly hair (The Philosopher’s Stone, 27). Despite another of Zipes’ assertions that Harry “is the perfect model…because he excels in almost everything” (180), Harry is not the most intelligent in the school and he most certainly is not the omnipotent hero that overcomes every obstacle by himself. In fact, Rowling provides him with life-long friends in Ron and Hermione who remain by his side through all the numerous trials and tribulation, and whom he needs to overcome them.

Additionally, in the climax of every trial in each novel in the series, Rowling aids Harry in overcoming his adversary with the help of Dumbledore, Snape and even his dead parents. Nikolajeva argues that the success of the Harry Potter series lies in how the novels manage to “both to empower the child and to protect him from the dangers of adulthood”. She continues with explaining that “the child hero can be as brave, clever, and strong as he pleases, but in the end, an adult will take over” (“The Secrets of Children’s Literature” 235). This claim can be discussed, however. In the last novel of the series, Harry reaches adulthood when he returns from the “after-life” and the conversation with Dumbledore, to confront Voldemort alone and take
responsibility for all the people that fight for him. This seems to suggest that the only “adult” that takes over in the end, is Harry himself when he finally “comes of age”.

Most importantly, in the series Rowling recurrently expresses that love and friendship can overcome evil and destruction. Love is such a strong motif in the Harry Potter series, that it even gives a substantial magical protection. To become the complete hero Harry must undergo some form of self-development where he comes to know his own potential and “the value of other creatures, great and small” (Pharr, 54-56). To understand that love and friendship can overcome any obstacles is a lesson in Harry’s heroic development. As it says in the prophecy, the hero “will have the power the Dark Lord knows not”. Love first and foremost is the one redeeming power that can overcome any evil deed. Moreover, these motifs give the reader—either child or adult—assurance that no matter what, the story is going to have a happy ending.

In her discussion of the mythological hero, Nikolajeva argues that it is not possible to treat Harry Potter as a mythic hero in the conventional sense since the mythical figure was essential for survival; and therefore it is not relevant to children (“A Return to the Romantic Hero” 126). However, she concurs that the mythic figure is a source of inspiration to authors of children’s literature. Ultimately, she contends that Harry Potter is the romantic hero who is assisted by magical helpers to triumphantly ascend from the underdog position to perpetual fame and riches (126-128). Nikolajeva’s article is yet another that was written before the completion of the series, and while it has its merits, some of the claims can be questioned. Among these claims is the argument that the mythical figure is essential for survival and that he is not necessarily relevant for children. First, Nikolajeva does not clarify why the mythical figure is essential for survival, which makes it difficult to understand her argument. Second, although ancient hero myths may not be relevant for young readers, one cannot deny that hero myths like Oedipus and Hercules sometimes ring true to the young reader. In fact, if a pattern keeps reappearing where the hero goes through the same steps throughout culture and history, it implies a correlation between human imagination and culture. These mythical heroic features do not have to be essential for survival, but for an understanding of life and death and love and hate. These concepts are relevant to all readers, to varying degrees.

While Grimes, too, discusses the romantic fairy-tale quality of Harry Potter, she also discusses what effect myths have on the reader. She argues that a function of the archetypical or mythical hero is “to help establish our connection with God”. God
represents wisdom and power, we desire this power, and we also want approval and freedom. She argues that adults “vicariously experience Harry’s learning that he is destined for greatness, for a meaningful mission” (108). Ultimately, she contends that Rank’s theories "provide us with allegories to understand our own worst and best impulses, to help us understand birth, death, sex, identity, and good and evil” (117).

Grimes, recognizing Rank’s scheme in the Harry Potter series, claims that Rank’s theories help us understand concepts such as birth, death, sex, identity, and good and evil. Whether Harry helps us understand all of these concepts can be discussed. While it can be agreed that themes of death, identity and good and evil help the reader understand life in the Harry Potter series, it can be argued whether it helps the reader understand the themes of birth and sex. Harry as a character and the series in general do not delve into questions about sexuality. Granted, there are infatuations between some of the teenage characters but the topic of sex is not further explored. However, there are other concepts that fill this void; stability, nurturing and family are more important and valued.

Furthermore, in my reading of Campbell’s and Rank’s heroic structures, certain objections can be raised. For example, both of them focus on similarities of hero myths, in Campbell’s discussion, similarities of religious and tribal rites and Rank takes his similarities from Mediterranean and Mesopotamian hero myths. Campbell explains his choice in the preface to The Hero with a Thousand Faces where he states that he has overlooked the differences and by focusing on the similarities he hopes to contribute to “human mutual understanding” (xxii). The result is that Campbell’s work does not contain a hero myth that applies or adheres to every stage in the structure, which excuses any failed attempt of seeing the monomyth in any particular literary work. Nevertheless, the point that Campbell and Rank like to stress is that there is something recognizable in their respective structures that has played a cord in readers’ hearts and recognition for a long time and always will.

There have been numerous approaches to understanding myth, such as psychoanalytical approaches to dreams and human imagination. While it is ambitious to claim that Rowling consciously used these mythological structures, one cannot deny that modern writers are very aware of these psychoanalytical models in seeing myth narrative due to their overexposure in our culture or “collective consciousness”. As a result, writers are influenced either positively or negatively. In the Harry Potter
series, Rowling has created a narrative about a tragic childhood overcome by adventure where the protagonist undergoes a self-development of his personal identity. While the series does not fully adhere to each individual theory, the amalgamation of different features from these heroic schemes makes the “fortunate blend of the straightforward and the reasonably intricate, the heroic and the everyday in Harry Potter” (Nikolajeva “Secrets of Children’s Literature” 225).

Furthermore, myth is not something we can discard easily because it pervades and has pervaded culture since time immemorial. We cannot deny our satisfaction and gratification when popular mythological patterns are adapted in cinematic and literary media. The Harry Potter series is a worthy example of a text where mythological heroic structures are recognizable. With a heroic pattern that grips our unconscious and our deeply ingrained views of Good and Evil, the Harry Potter series is a modernization of a traditional formula where Rowling has created a highly sympathetic protagonist who in many ways is the antithesis of the omnipotent and powerful hero. The Harry Potter novels are so popular because they contain recognizable features from recurring mythological structures. Just as we sympathetically visualize the young lonely orphan experiencing adventures, it pleases us when he finds friendship, nurture and love.
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