MYTHS AND MOVIES: A MYTHOGRAPHICAL METHODOLOGY
OF MOTION PICTURE ANALYSIS

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Denton, Texas
August, 1996
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Over the past decade, cinema studies scholars have begun to recognize the value of mythographical methodologies for motion picture analysis; however, most of the scholarly research in this field has focused either on mythic archetypal images or on monomythic narrative structure, rather than combining the two approaches into a unified theory. This essay addresses the problem by proposing a mythographical methodology of motion picture analysis based on Carl Jung’s theory of archetypal images and Joseph Campbell’s theories concerning the monomythic structure of heroic narratives. Combining the two approaches of myth interpretation results in a more comprehensive methodology for interpreting the mythic elements of motion pictures. The essay illustrates the application of this methodology through a detailed analysis of Terry Gilliam’s film, *The Fisher King*. 
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INTRODUCTION

Motion picture analysis is anything but an exact science. Yet, those who embark upon the task of dissecting and explaining movies often turn toward one or more of the social sciences to provide a framework through which to understand the cinema. Film theorists and critics through the years have honed their own craft by borrowing ideas from scholarly disciplines such as linguistics, sociology, and psychoanalysis. Over the past three decades, the literature of film criticism has been dominated by ideological, feminist, and, to a lesser degree, psychoanalytic approaches; however, since the early 1980's, mythography, the scientific study of mythology, has emerged as a viable methodological tool for cinema studies. More specifically, film scholars are increasingly turning toward the theories of myth advanced by Carl Jung as a method for studying the relationship between motion pictures and the viewing audience.

In this essay, I employ the principles of Jungian psychology to propose a mythographical method of motion picture analysis. An example of the application of this method is given through an analysis of Terry Gilliam's 1991 film, *The Fisher King*. While many writers, especially literary critics such as Northrop Frye, have used Jung's ideas as a foundation for their methodologies, my work is based largely on the writings of Jung himself and those of mythologist Joseph Campbell. Campbell was an avid disciple of Carl Jung, and, as a professor of literature, he utilized the principles of analytic psychology in

1Although the phrase "Terry Gilliam's *The Fisher King*" implies that the motion picture is primarily the product of its director, it should be noted that I do not subscribe wholesale to the "auteur theory." A single film is a collaboration of numerous creative individuals and cannot be reduced to the vision of a single producer, writer, or director. However, associating a film with its director is quite common in film literature, and I will follow this convention for the sake of convenience.
his own analysis of narrative forms. Furthermore, Campbell demonstrates that he is acutely aware of the power and importance of motion pictures when he states,

[Movies] might be our counterpart to mythological re-enactments—except that we don't have the same kind of thinking going into the production of a movie that goes into the production of an initiation ritual. What is unfortunate for us is that a lot of the people who write these stories do not have the sense of their responsibility. These stories are making and breaking lives.²

While this indictment is probably true of most motion pictures produced today, Campbell himself believed that some moviemakers are aware of their responsibility in creating these stories that are making and breaking lives. With reference to the Star Wars trilogy, he claims that George Lucas "has put the newest and most powerful spin" to the classical story of the hero's journey.³ For Campbell, the hero's journey is not simply a narrative convention; it is a profound mythological expression of the great possibilities inherent in every human life. Since movies may indeed be "our counterpart to mythological re-enactments," they merit serious consideration for the effect they have on the individual and cultural psyche.

Myths and Movies

Everyone has a story, whether it is their own imagined fairy tale or their personal autobiography, and any such story can be analyzed for its relationship to mythological patterns. Yet some stories will inevitably stand out beyond all others, either because they succeed in capturing the hearts and minds of the masses or because they so clearly reflect the fundamental ethos of a particular age or culture. Here we think of Homer's The Odyssey from ancient Greece, the Sumero-Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, the Hebraic Torah, the Christian Gospels, the Hindu Vedas, or Dante's Inferno to name only a few. These stories are recognized as myths which imaginatively express the cultural

consciousness of the age from which they emerge, but also transcend the time and space of their own creation, speaking fundamental truths to persons of all times and places.

The basic themes of these ancient myths continue to be expressed in contemporary art forms, and can be identified through the images of the cinema. We find variations of the classic hero's journey in *Star Wars* and *The Wizard of Oz*; the Greek myth of Pygmalion informs *My Fair Lady* and *Educating Rita*; Pyramus and Thisbe have been reincarnated through *West Side Story* and *Love Story*; the Prometheus myth appears in the *Frankenstein* and *Terminator* movies. The vocation of the mythographical film critic is to recognize how the universal themes of ancient myths are presented through the contemporary art form of narrative motion pictures, and to suggest how these mythic motifs speak to the cultural consciousness of the critic's own age. Hence, stated in general terms, the mythographer's task is twofold: 1) to identify the mythic themes in motions pictures which represent universal narrative patterns and archetypal characters found in myths throughout the ages; and 2) to recognize specific cultural issues and problems that are being addressed through these mythic representations.

Myth and *The Fisher King*

According to Campbell, the story which best captures the spirit of Medieval Europe is the quest for the holy Grail by the knights of King Arthur's round table. As a myth, the Grail story is much more than an archaic medieval legend; it is a narrative metaphor that can speak profound truths even to a twentieth-century psyche. If we can see through the folk symbols and capture the radiance of its elemental ideas, the story of the Grail quest can remain as informative for modern society as it was for its original audience. Such is the case with Terry Gilliam's *The Fisher King*, a thoroughly contemporary interpretation of the medieval myth. I have chosen this film as the subject of my analysis for several

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reasons: 1) it self-consciously incorporates specific mythic themes from the traditional Grail legend; 2) its structure illustrates the monomythic pattern of the hero's journey; 3) it addresses some important issues within the collective consciousness of our society, namely our tendency to associate personal identity with image (persona) rather than substance (the self), our preference for extroverted personality over introverted personality, our repression of the intuitive and feeling functions of the psyche, and our drive for power over others at the expense of compassion. Thus, through a mythographical criticism of The Fisher King, we will see that the universal motifs and symbols of the original Grail legend have been reinterpreted in ways that are relevant and informative to modern America.

In Part I of this essay entitled “Myths, Dreams, and Movies,” I discuss the relevance of mythographical methods for film analysis and propose my own model of mythographical film criticism. In Chapter 1, I explain general precepts of the field of mythography, discuss the relevance of mythographical methods for motion picture criticism, and present an exemplary review of the literature on this methodology. I proceed in Chapter 2 by discussing general principles of my own mythographical model of film analysis. Chapter 3 addresses the monomythic structure of the hero's journey as it relates to the cycle of human growth and development. In Chapter 4, I discuss the relationship between the characters of myth and archetypal images of the unconscious human mind.

In Part II entitled “The Grail Comes to New York,” I employ the elements of mythographical criticism for an analysis of The Fisher King. I begin in Chapter 5 by discussing the initial critical reaction to the film, and outline the general approach through which I analyze the The Fisher King. My analysis of The Fisher King in relation to mythic themes proceeds in Chapters 6, 7, and 8 by following the hero through the stages of what Campbell calls the "monomyth": stage 1 of the journey is the hero's separation from the
ordinary world; stage two involves the hero's initiation into the strange "other world"; the journey concludes in stage 3 with the hero's return home. Following the hero along these stages, I discuss the archetypal function of each of the main characters of the narrative, describe the societal problems suggested by the central conflicts of the story, and uncover the film's prescriptive formula through which these problems might be addressed. Finally, in Chapter 9, I draw some general conclusions about my analysis of *The Fisher King*, and make suggestions for further studies in the field of mythographical film criticism.

I believe that mythographical criticism is an important addition to the methodologies typically used to analyze narrative film. Founded on Jungian analytic psychology and subsequent theories of archetypal psychology, mythographical criticism does address significant cultural issues revealed through narrative film; however, it also moves beyond the specific concerns of a given culture, seeking to uncover the generic or universal "human" story being expressed within and through the narrative. There are precedents for the method of film analysis I am proposing, as I will make clear in my summary of relevant literature; however, none of this literature addresses the particular issues and themes inherent to the medieval Grail legend or Gilliam's *The Fisher King*. With my research, I hope to make a helpful contribution to this important method of film analysis.
PART I

MYTHS, DREAMS, AND MOVIES
CHAPTER 1

THE CURRENT STATE OF MYTHOGRAPHICAL FILM CRITICISM

Precepts of Mythography

In his book *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals*, William Doty acknowledges that "the terms myth and ritual are used with a multitude of different meanings in the many disciplines where they are studied, even when scholars attempt to avoid the casualness of everyday speech." Such definitions range from very detailed and

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complex explications to quite simple or general statements. For example, Doty defines myth as

*Culturally important imaginal stories, conveying by means of metaphoric and symbolic diction, graphic imagery, and emotional conviction and participation, the primal, foundational accounts of aspects of the real, experienced world and humankind's role and relative statuses within it.*

Joseph Campbell offers a more succinct definition: "Myths are clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life."³

As Doty suggests, it is important to understand that the truths in myths cannot be discerned by a literal interpretation; myths are imaginal stories which communicate their meaning through metaphoric and symbolic imagery. Myths are important, as Campbell argues, because they speak to the spiritual issues of humankind. According to Campbell, myth functions to relate individuals to: 1) his or her own psychological identity; 2) to the larger society in which the individual participates; 3) to the cosmos by rendering an image of the universe and the individual's place in it; and 4) to the ultimate "mystery" of being which lies behind all forms.⁴ Thus, hidden behind the metaphorical language of myth are clues about how we can understand the most important facets of our existence.

Another crucial point which Campbell emphasizes is the "local" and "universal" manifestations of myths. This point was made in the late 1800's by Adolf Bastion who differentiated between the elementary ideas which are universal and the ethnic ideas that are responsible for the actual cultural manifestations of universal forms.⁵ Following

³Doty, p. 11
Bastion, Campbell writes,

We may therefore think of any myth or rite either as a clue to what may be permanent or universal in human nature (in which case our emphasis will be psychological, or perhaps even metaphysical), or, on the other hand, as a function of the local scene, the landscape, the history, and the sociology of the folk concerned (in which case our approach will be ethnological or historical).

In mythographical studies, we should maintain a careful balance between the local and universal aspects of myth. By concentrating too much on the local, we fail to see the larger significance of the underlying themes; by overemphasizing the universal, we cannot discern what relevance these themes have for everyday life.

My own approach to mythographical studies, like Campbell and Jung's, emphasizes the psychological aspect of myth, concentrating on how universal forms are represented through current cultural symbols, and what these symbols have to say about the psychological issues of individuals and society. Many other researchers, particularly psychologists, have, over recent years, embraced mythographical methodologies as interpretive tools for their own scholarly work. As I will discuss in the next section, there seems to be an increasing awareness concerning the relevance of mythology to modern life.

General Statement of the Problem

Over the last decade, a wealth of literature has emerged that addresses the issue of mythology as it relates to individual and social problems. Contemporary popular psychologists such as Robert Johnson, Rollo May, and Thomas More have suggested that Western persons, and particularly Americans, are living without a vital mythology to guide their lives. Such psychologists also suggest that the absence of a “myth-consciousness” is

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a major contributor to individual neuroses and social upheaval. Philip Wheelwright summarizes this position quite clearly:

Our current motivating ideas are not myths but ideologies, lacking transcendental significance. This loss of myth-consciousness I believe to be the most devastating loss that humanity can suffer; for as I have argued, myth consciousness is the bond that unites men both with one another and with the unplumbed Mystery from which mankind is sprung and without reference to which the radical significance of things goes to pot. Now a world bereft of radical significance is not long tolerated; it leaves men radically unstable, so that they will seize at any myth or pseudomyth that is offered.8

If Wheelwright is correct, and I believe he is, it is imperative that we give attention to the role that mythology, or the lack of mythology, plays in our lives.

Contemporary writers who are calling for a reawakening of "myth-consciousness" are following in the footsteps of Jung's theories concerning myth and the human psyche. Jung states,

The man who thinks he can live without myth, or outside it, is an exception. He is like one uprooted, having no true link either with the past, or with the ancestral life which continues within him, or yet with contemporary human society.9

He goes on to suggest that myth is related to culture as dream is related to the individual. According to Jung, an individual's dream functions not only as symbolic fulfillment of unconscious desires, but also as a clue for how our desires might find fulfillment.

Similarly, the mythic stories embraced by a society function as symbolic clues, elucidating both the problems and the solutions to problems within a given social group. Such stories are always presented in the masks and costumes recognizable to the specific culture in


which they emerge; however, behind the particular cultural accent of a given story, there often rests mythological themes that address critical issues of generic human experience. Thus, mythology speaks both to the "local" concerns of a given society, and to the "universal" issues that face all humans regardless of geographical or historical contingencies.

Scholars are now realizing that the stories presented in the cinema can express mythic themes relevant to our own culture. Psychotherapist Geoffrey Hill states that "our participation in the cinema is our participation in myth. While the names, times, and styles have changed, the myths that were familiar to our ancestors are myths on the silver screen."¹⁰ Film analysts Thomas S. Frentz and Janice Hocker Rushing claim that "films are to the cultural psyche what dreams are to the individual psyche."¹¹ Similarly, Davies, Farrell, and Matthews argue that "stylistic elements inherent in cinema make it especially amenable to the communication of archetypal material."¹² Along with these writers, I believe that the recognition of mythic themes in film can provide us with crucial information about the problems within the collective psyche of our society, and reveal insights about how these problems can be transcended. This type of criticism encompasses a larger field of inquiry than do methods which narrowly focus on how issues of class, race, gender, or politics are reflected in media forms. While recognizing these specific concerns of a particular society, mythographical criticism also seeks to uncover the more universal elements of a story, revealing to us through metaphor the collective wisdom of humanity.

An increase of our overall myth-consciousness is of vital importance to a fragmented society such as ours. As we see ourselves reflected in the characters of mythology, we begin to recognize our connectedness to other human beings throughout history and across cultures. As we identify with mythic heroes, we can begin to learn from their mistakes and glean the wisdom from their triumphs. Many scholars have realized the potential merits that mythographical studies can bring to individuals and society. As the following literature review will illustrate, a number of cinema studies scholars are among those who are calling for a heightened awareness of myth-consciousness.

Review of the Literature

The application of mythographical criticism to cinema studies can be seen as an outgrowth of similar methodologies applied to literature. Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* is generally recognized as the first attempt to uncover mythic patterns and prototypes in literature. Working at the turn of the century, Frazer approached mythology from the perspective of a social anthropologist. Toward the middle of this century, Carl Jung began his seminal work in the field, interpreting myth as a psychologist. Jung advances his theory of literature in relation to the archetypes of the human psyche in *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*. For Jung, the recurring images and symbols in mythological literature are collective representations which reveal the very structure of the human psyche: to understand myth is to understand the essence of who we are.\(^\text{13}\)

Following the lead of these pioneers, many other literary scholars have explored the ways myths from previous eras can function to prefigure themes and images in contemporary narrative forms. Most directly related to my methodology are the scholars who have focused on the "monomythic" patterns of literature, most notably Northrop Frye and Joseph Campbell, both of whom are highly influenced by Jung. In *Anatomy of Criticism* and in *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology*, Frye identifies four basic patterns of myth in literature. He draws connections between the four major genres of literature (comedy, romance, tragedy, and satire) and certain "cyclical" experiences of human life: the rising and falling of the sun; the changes of the four seasons; and the developmental stages of human life. Frye believes that the central narratives of myths are constructed out of these cyclical experiences.

Campbell focuses his studies on the underlying structure of the mythic hero's journey. In the *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell cites numerous examples from world literature to illustrate the monomythic pattern of the hero's separation, initiation, and return. This pattern, he argues, is connected to the structure of ancient rites of passage; like those rituals, heroic myths can function to affect a psychological transformation within persons who understand the symbolic messages of myth. Campbell expands this thesis in subsequent works such as *The Mythic Image*.

Influenced by such analyses of literature, several cinema studies scholars have embraced a mythographical method of criticism. Relying on Frye's definition of myth


Other important contributions to the mythographical criticism of literature include Ernst Cassier's *Language and Myth*, trans. Susanne K. Langer (New York: Dover, 1914) and Susanne K. Langer's *Philosophy in a New Key* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1941).

One of the first attempts to deal seriously with the mythological aspects of motion pictures is found in Parker Tyler's *Magic and Myth of the Movies* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970) and *The Hollywood Hallucination* (New York: Simon and Schuster,
and Campbell's explication of the function of myth, Rita Park's *The Western Hero in Film and Television: Mass Media Mythology* traces the role of the hero through numerous examples of the Western film genre. Drawing primarily from Mircea Eliade, Frye, and Jung, Geoffrey Hill's *Illuminating Shadows: The Mythic Power of Film* analyzes over fifteen films, uncovering the relevance of their mythic themes to contemporary audiences.

In *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters*, Christopher Vogler adopts Campbell's monomyth of the hero's journey to analyze the mythic structure of contemporary screenplays. Strongly Jungian in orientation, Janice Hocker Rushing and Thomas Frentz' *Projecting the Shadow: The Cyborg Hero in American Film* presents a "transmodern" theory of motion picture analysis, focusing attention of the relationship between the traditional "hunter myth" and contemporary cinematic presentations of "technological man."

Along with the above mentioned texts, several scholarly articles reflect a mythographical method of interpreting film. In "*The Wizard of Oz: Therapeutic Rhetoric in a Contemporary Media Ritual,*" D. Payne suggests that the annual airing of Dorothy's mythological adventure in maturation serves a helpful therapeutic function for some viewers. John Beebe's article "The Notorious Post-War Psyche" argues that a Jungian analysis of the central female character of Hitchcock's *Notorious* can yield implications for the healing of post-war consciousness. The mythological journey of the American male hero is analyzed in Amanda Smith and Thomas Loë's "Mythic Descent in *Dances with 1944). Influenced more by Freud than Jung, much of Tyler's work addresses the mythological symbolism surrounding Hollywood stars, but he also discusses how the unconscious mind views a film and how we accept certain actions in movies that we would never accept in real life. Although it does not specifically address the area of mythology, Christian Metz' *The Imaginary Signifier* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1982) is a classic study which addresses the function of signs and symbols as well as the role of the unconscious in relation to the cinema. Influenced by the neo-Freudian theories of Jaques Lacan, Metz uses the principles of semiotics to describe the ways meaning is created within the film text/film spectator interaction.
Wolves" and in Peter Parshall's "Die Hard and the American Mythos." Influenced by the work of Frentz and Rushing, Martha Solomon analyzes two heroes that symbolize the conflict between opposing myths of the American dream in "Villainless quest: Myth, Metaphor, and Dream in Chariots of Fire." Along with the work of Frentz and Rushing, two articles stand out as excellent resources for specifically Jungian perspectives of film analysis. Davies, Ferrell, and Matthews' "The Dream World of Film: A Jungian Perspective on Cinematic Communication" and Robert Terrill's "Put on a Happy Face: Batman as Schizophrenic Savior" both present clear and concise arguments for a critical method based on Jung's theory of archetypes.

As this literature review illustrates, mythographical methods of film criticism are gaining some recognition within the academic field of cinema studies. My own methodology is based on the work of Jung and Campbell, and is therefore similar to the approach of several authors I have mentioned, such as Frentz and Rushing; Davies, Ferrell and Matthews; and Vogler. Like these scholars, I believe that narrative film can function to represent the current state of the collective social psyche. I also agree that the archetypes of the human unconscious which appear in dreams, active imagination, and in art (including film) provide us with clues concerning the potential integration of psychic conflict within individuals and society. In terms of method, my research differs from the above authors only slightly in that I emphasize the unique contributions of both Campbell and Jung rather than relying more on one than the other. Employing the concepts of both Campbell and Jung allows me to explore the universality of specific mythic images (the archetypes) as well as the universality of mythic patterns of narrative (the monomyth). My primary contribution to this field is the topic of my analysis. I have yet to uncover any research which specifically addresses the relevance of the Grail legend themes to modern society as they are expressed through The Fisher King. Thus, in the following chapters, I
offer my own version of a mythographical methodology for motion picture criticism, and a thorough analysis of the mythic themes revealed in *The Fisher King*. 
CHAPTER 2

A MODEL FOR MYTHOGRAPHICAL FILM ANALYSIS

The basic premise behind this method argues that the content of some motion pictures embodies mythic themes, and that myths themselves are a reflection of the psychic state of a society, particularly the unconscious aspects of the collective psyche. The crux of this premise is based on an analogy uncovered by depth psychologists: myths address the unconscious psychic issues of society in much the same way that dreams unveil the unconscious contents within the individual psyche. Some mythographic film critics extend this analogy, arguing that the interaction between the film text and the film viewer is also analogous to the relationship between dreams and dreamers. When films are seen as myths, they too constitute a significant communication of the collective unconscious psyche. Given these assumptions, the role of a film analyst can been seen as analogous to the vocation of a psychoanalyst. As Frentz and Rushing state,

‘If films are to a large extent public dreams, then our role as critics is similar to that of the depth analyst: to interpret how the film as a collective dream provides a picture of the cultural unconscious.’

Thus, to appreciate this methodology, we must first understand the connection between dreams, myths, and movies.

Dreams and Art

Depth psychologists believe that dreams are the primary way in which the unconscious expresses itself. Jung writes that "dreams are spontaneous products of the

1Frentz and Rushing, Projecting the Shadow (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 47.
unconscious psyche...they show us the unvarnished truth." Not all dreams concern the deeper aspects of the psyche; some are merely a dramatic play of images surrounding the preoccupations of that particular day. However, occasionally we experience significant numinous dreams that emerge from the subterranean world of the unconscious. These "big" dreams, as Jung calls them, occur when an individual is experiencing some significant psychological crisis. According to Jung, such dreams function as

...an anticipation in the unconscious of future conscious achievements, something like a preliminary exercise or sketch, or plan roughed out in advance. Its symbolic content sometimes outlines the solution of a conflict.¹

Jung found that the contents of such dreams were more closely associated with mythic images than with any imagery that could possibly emerge from an individual's personal experience. Furthermore, a disturbed individual can even dream in mythic imagery that can be traced to cultures far removed temporally and geographically from the dreamer. These observations contributed to Jung's formulation of the concept of the collective unconscious. Present in the human psyche at birth, the collective unconscious contains within it the accumulated experience of the human species as a whole and functions as a reservoir of latent primordial or archetypal images.² Archetypes are universal, and everyone inherits the same basic images within the collective unconscious. Since they are inherited, archetypal images are basically predispositions or potentialities for experiencing and responding to the world in similar ways to our ancestors. However,

⁴Jung's idea of the collective unconscious is among his most controversial theories. However, Jung is following a philosophical tradition which claims that certain "ideas" are inherent to the human mind, present in consciousness at birth, prior to any physical experience of the world. Plato referred to such ideas as "Forms"; Kant called them "a priori knowledge"; and Tillich believed that certain ideas, such as the idea of God, are ontologically present in the human mind.
it is important to understand that the archetypes of the collective unconscious exist "not in the form of images filled with content, but at first only as forms without content, representing the possibility of a certain type of perception and action." Archetypes are like blueprints from which we can construct our own lives.

Hence, according to Jung, archetypal dreams can give us clues about how we might overcome the problems we face. Deep within our collective unconscious we already know the paths we must follow to become self-aware and more fully realize our potential. The function of dreams is to bring this innate knowledge to the surface of consciousness by way of its symbolic imagery. Through a careful analysis of dream symbolism, we can begin to hear voices from within our own being, calling us to bring forth the hidden possibilities of our lives.

The method Jung used for interpreting dream symbolism is called amplification. Jungian analyst Robert Johnson describes amplification as "a process of gathering information about the archetypes that appear in our dreams by going to sources such as myths, fairy tales, and ancient religious traditions." Through this process we can make connections between the images in our own dreams and the characters and themes of mythology. With reference to amplifying the "big" dreams of his patients, Jung believed that

...such dreams are best interpreted, not by reference backward to repressed infantile memories, but by comparison outward with the analogous mythic forms, so that the disturbed individual may learn to see himself depersonalized in the mirror of the human spirit and discover by analogy the way to his larger fulfillment.

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In essence, the patients would be encouraged to see themselves as characters acting within the mythic drama produced by their own dreams. By making these connections and bringing the contents of the unconscious into consciousness, they could gain clarity about their behavioral motivations. With such clarity comes the greater possibility of making positive choices about the way one wishes to live.

Similar to dreams, imaginative works of art can also function as symbolic expressions of the human unconscious. According to Jung, some works of art embody mythic themes which transcend the particular concerns of the individual artist, and address the unconscious psyche of the culture in which the artist exists. Just as "big" dreams are the result of psychic disequilibrium within the individual, some works of art reflect mythic motifs because they "derive from a pervasive psychic imbalance in the epoch or culture" in which the artist lives. Furthermore, like dreams can speak to the problems facing an individual, art can address the critical psychological issues of the culture, "educating the spirit of the age, conjuring up the forms in which the age is most lacking." From this perspective, a careful amplification of the mythic images in contemporary art can enlighten us to the essential problems plaguing our society, and give us direction for how such problems might be overcome.

An excellent example of mythic motifs in contemporary art can be found in T. S. Eliot's poem *The Waste Land*. Eliot characterizes the post World War I era as a despiritualized desert. Embracing imagery from the Medieval Grail legend of the Fisher King, Eliot sees America as suffering from the same type of spiritual infertility that

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plagued Europe in the Middle Ages. With reference to Eliot's work, Joseph Campbell comments,

And what is the nature of the wasteland? It is a land where everybody is living an inauthentic life, doing as other people do, doing as you're told, with no courage for your own life. That is the wasteland. And that is what T. S. Eliot meant in his poem *The Waste Land*.

Eliot challenges us to re-examine ourselves, to have the courage to break with social norms that are bringing death to the spirit, and to resurrect the passions which give vitality to life. Here, the art of one individual serves as a voice for the collective psyche of an entire culture, calling us through symbolic and mythic imagery to realize the hidden potential within us.

The Mythic Power of Motion Pictures

When motion pictures are interpreted as works of art from this perspective, they can be seen as vehicles for the communication of mythic imagery, and can be analyzed for the ways in which they address the unconscious psyche of our culture. As an art form, the stylistic elements of motion pictures are particularly well suited for the communication of mythic material. Like the human psyche, movies embody elements which are rational, conscious and objective (realism) as well as elements which are irrational, unconscious, and subjective (formalism). Reflecting the "realist" tradition, through mis-en-scene techniques, motion pictures render images which appear congruous with a rational view of objective reality. Yet, with reference to the "formalist" tradition, these images are abstracted and expressed subjectively through production and post-production techniques that transcend any rational observation of the world. As Davies, Farrell, and Matthews have observed,

In meshing these basic dimensions film is able to create a stylized reality, a juxtaposition of the "real" and the "fantastic" that can reflect the conscious-

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unconscious interplay described by Jung...In so relating itself to the dream, film replicates what Jung thought to be the purest and most spontaneous source of expression for the collective unconscious.\textsuperscript{11}

Based on the analogy drawn between dreams and motion pictures, my approach to film analysis is similar to Jung's method of amplification, drawing connections between the images on screen and the symbols of mythology. Applying this method to film studies, the narrative structure of a movie can be examined to determine how it: 1) relates to monomythic patterns of traditional myths; and 2) how these mythic patterns reflect the cyclical experiences of human life. Similarly, the protagonists and antagonists of a film story can be explored to understand how they: 1) represent archetypal characters found in myths and fairy tales across the world; and 2) how they are symbolic of the various functions of the individual human psyche.

It is important to understand that analytic psychology was developed by Jung for both descriptive and prescriptive purposes. As a theory of human behavior, it is concerned with describing the relationship between the conscious and unconscious processes of the human mind. However, analytic psychology is also a particular procedure for diagnosing and treating psychoneuroses. Based on these principles, mythographical film criticism also carries elements of description and prescription. It can be used to describe how meaning is created in the film narrative through an examination of its dramatic structure and the function of its characters. Beyond the level of description, mythological criticism is concerned with the fundamental values expressed through the narrative, and how these values operate in a prescriptive way for the story's protagonist and, by way of identification, for the audience watching the film.

An excellent example of how mythic motifs can be expressed through motion pictures

\textsuperscript{11}Davies, Farrell, and Matthews, p. 333.
is found in the *Star Wars* saga. With reference to Lucas' trilogy, Campbell states,

Certainly *Star Wars* has a valid mythological perspective. It shows the state as a machine and asks, "Is the machine going to crush humanity or serve humanity?" Humanity comes not from the machine but from the heart.\(^\text{12}\)

In *Star Wars* the fundamental theme of good vs. evil is presented through the conflict between the State (represented by Darth Vader and the Empire) and the individual (represented by Luke Skywalker and the rebel forces). The humanity of Darth Vader has been crushed; he is more of a machine than a human, for he has given over to the temptations of power offered by allegiance to the brutal empire and to the "dark side" of the Force. The same temptation faces Luke; however, the young hero does not yield to anger and hatred but follows the compassion of his heart. He refuses the alluring power offered to him by the State, and as a result, he finds the inner strength to save his own humanity, and to aid his comrades in overthrowing the evil Empire.

*Star Wars* presents "a valid mythological perspective," because its themes address issues that are universal to human experience. We all must decide where to place our allegiances; we must choose whether we will pursue power and control over others, or whether we will serve others through loyalty and compassion. Each path exists as an inherent possibility within every human life, and the conflict of which of these roads to follow is the primary problem faced by Luke Skywalker. The lesson of the *Star Wars* myth is that the pursuit of power and control leads to the loss of one's own identity as a human, while loyalty and compassion for others leads us to the center of our own humanity.

This brief assessment of the mythic themes in *Star Wars* represents only the most general application of my methodology. In the following chapters, I return to the *Star Wars* trilogy and cite examples from other films to illustrate how their structure reflects

\(^{12}\text{Campbell, *Power of Myth*, pp. 23-24.}\)
the monomythic pattern of the hero's journey and how films' characters represent archetypes of the unconscious psyche.

It should be noted, however, that interpreting symbols in dreams or in motion pictures is not a quick or easy endeavor. We must take the time and effort to explore these symbols, to reflect and meditate upon them, because the conscious mind does not always readily accept what the unconscious has to offer. As Davies, Farrell, and Matthews suggest,

>Seldom is the full significance of a dream immediately apparent, no matter how vivid and engaging, and the same may be true of the images on the screen...While the potential for expanded awareness is presented, such benefits seem to require the effort of subsequent reflection on both our life circumstances and the fantasy images encountered.\footnote{Davies, Farrell, and Matthews, pp. 342-343.}

With this caution in mind, in the next two chapters I discuss in detail the two central aspects of my methodology: 1) the monomythic pattern of hero's journey as it relates to the structure of narrative films; and 2) the archetypal figures of mythology as they appear in the characters of motion pictures.
CHAPTER 3

MONOMYTHIC STRUCTURE

Jung believes that intrapsychic conflict is inevitable. Our psyche is composed of opposing attitudes (extroversion and introversion) and mental functions (thinking and feeling, sensing and intuiting) which come to fruition through the process of individuation. He uses the term "individuation to denote the process by which a person becomes a psychological 'in-dividual,' that is, a separate, indivisible unity or 'whole'." The ideal goal of individuation is to achieve a state of balance between the opposing forces, wherein each attitude and function can be utilized by consciousness when it is needed. Typically, however, such a balance does not exist. For instance, we may assume a predominantly extraverted attitude toward life, while repressing the introverted aspects of personality; we may utilize our thinking functions, while our ability to fully "feel" the experiences of life remains underdeveloped. In such cases, a person experiences psychic conflict to relative degrees between the forces which are dominant and those which are being repressed.

The Cycle of Life

Psychic conflicts are even more pronounced at certain crucial points of human life. According to developmental psychology, each stage of life presents psychosocial challenges based on the inevitable changes of the human body. For instance, childhood is

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characterized by an attitude of physical and psychological dependency upon caregivers. The first great challenge comes with the onset of puberty when the child's body is transformed into that of an adult. At this point, the child becomes capable of functioning independently both from a physical and psychological perspective. The challenge is whether or not the child will accept his or her role as a young adult. This situation provides fertile ground for psychic conflict as the person's will is simultaneously pulled backward toward the comfort of childhood dependency and forward toward the exciting possibilities of independent adulthood. Similar problems occur during mid-life and retirement. Each stage of life presents its own psychological challenges and problems in accordance with the ineluctable changes of human physiology and its attendant social expectations. From this perspective, human growth and development can be seen as a series of thresholds leading from the womb to the tomb through which we all can willingly or reluctantly pass.

According to Campbell, mythology can help us through the psychosocial conflicts we face in everyday life; however, it can be particularly helpful to us through the potentially traumatic developmental periods of puberty, mid-life, and retirement. The central function of mythology is to shape and form the psychological posture of individuals so they can live in accord both with their own nature and with the demands of society. Human life itself can be seen as analogous to the archetypal journey of the hero found in myths throughout the world. The hero's journey is nothing less than a representation of the process of individuation wherein the attitudes (extraversion and introversion) and the functions (thinking, feeling, sensing, and intuiting) of the psyche are fully developed and differentiated. The goal of individuation is to expand one's consciousness so as to become as self-aware as possible. Thus, the hero's adventure is a journey of self-discovery.
The Hero's Journey

The standard mythological adventure of the hero follows a well-established pattern based on the formula of traditional rites of passage: separation; initiation; return. In Campbell's words,

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 boons on his fellow man.  

Campbell refers to this formula as the "monomyth," because any depiction of the hero's journey will follow this basic pattern. Throughout his writings, Campbell outlines the numerous ways in which the monomyth has been presented in mythological literature:

Prometheus ascended to the heavens, stole fire from the gods, and descended. Jason sailed through the Clashing Rocks into a sea of marvels, circumvented the dragon that guarded the Golden Fleece, and returned with the fleece and the power to wrest his rightful throne from a usurper. Aeneas went down into the underworld, crossed the dreadful river of the dead, threw a sop to the three-headed watchdog Cerberus, and conversed, at last, with the shade of his dead father...He returned through the ivory gate to his work in the world.

Although the story can be told with seemingly infinite variety, the heroes of mythology are basically following the same path of separation, initiation, and return. The cyclical nature of this monomyth has also been recognized by Northrop Frye. Frye writes,

In the solar cycle of the day, the seasonal cycle of the year, and the organic cycle of human life, there is a single pattern of significance, out of which myth constructs a central narrative around a figure who is partly the sun, partly vegetative fertility, and partly a god or archetypal human being.

The pattern which underlies the mythic journey of the hero is a reflection of the psychological processes we experience during the developmental stages of human growth. Each child must venture forth from his or her ordinary world into the strange realm of

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adolescence. In this new frontier, the child will face conflicts, battling the demons of his or her own psyche. If successful, the child returns from this intrapsychic warfare into the ordinary world; however, the ordinary world is no longer that of childhood, because the hero has been forever changed, now relating to the world as a young adult. Similar adventures are undertaken as young adults pass through mid-life into older adulthood, and as older adults venture through retirement into old age. Although the challenges of each stage are different, the basic pattern remains the same. At each stage of life, the person must let go of his or her former identity in order to grow. Metaphorically, the child within us must die in order for the adult to be born.

The Monomyth in Motion Pictures

Turning again to the *Star Wars* saga, we see an excellent contemporary version of the monomythic hero's journey. The story begins with Luke Skywalker living a somewhat regimented domestic lifestyle, working as a farmer on his home planet of Tatooine. Though he dreams of being an adventurous pilot, he appears to be stuck. When he inadvertently receives a message about a princess in distress, Luke is suddenly thrust into an adventure beyond his expectations. Luke's first initiation into the strange "otherworld" comes when he visits a bar filled with fantastic creatures wherein he begins to learn of the dangers he will face along his adventure. Throughout the three films of the saga, Luke faces a series of trials and tests, but ultimately he stands face to face with his greatest menace, Darth Vader. Through his courage and cunning, the young hero overcomes the forces of the dark side, and achieves the ultimate rewards for himself (becoming a Jedi knight) and his people (freedom from the tyrannical empire). In essence, the story is about Luke's maturation as he grows from a disgruntled and naive youth into an integrated adult who has full command of his abilities.
This monomythic pattern is reflected in countless other cinematic narratives. Although it can appear in any type of story, some motion picture genres are particularly well suited for retelling the classic hero's journey. *Star Wars* is an excellent example of how "science fiction" films can reflect this pattern. "Fantasy" films such as Dorothy's adventure in *The Wizard of Oz* also provide fertile ground for communicating mythic themes. John Dunbar's descent into the world of the Native American land and psyche in *Dances with Wolves* is an example of the "Western" genre's depiction of the monomyth. The "Horror" film *The Silence of the Lambs* tells the story of Clarice Starling's maturation through descending into the strange and frightening world of Hannibal Lecter. However, we don't have to travel into the past, the future, or the horrific to witness this pattern in film. Romantic comedies and character dramas can reflect the monomyth as well: Michael Dorsey's adventure into "womanhood" in *Tootsie* is an excellent portrayal of this myth as is John Book's encounter with the Amish in *Witness*.

Each of these characters in film is presented uniquely with their own personal idiosyncrasies, their own strengths and flaws. While we may not be able to relate specifically to their situations in life, we do relate, by analogy, to the general types of issues they face. Like them, we strive to become integrated and self-aware human beings. Like them, we ultimately must face the antagonists that stand in the way of our own fulfillment. We resonate with these hero's because the trials of our own lives are metaphorically reflected in their adventures.

During the hero's adventure, as well as in the journey of life itself, certain people or events will appear, functioning to help us, to hinder us, or simply to confuse us along the way. These characters or occurrences are reflections of psychic energies that already exist unconsciously within us. Jung refers to these forms as archetypes, and in order for the hero to successfully achieve the adventure, he or she must encounter and incorporate each
of these forms into his or her own psyche. We will now turn to a more detailed examination of the central archetypal forms which appear in myth and dream.
CHAPTER 4

CHARACTERS AND ARCHETYPES

Just as each hero follows the same archetypal path during his or her journey, these adventurers will also encounter similar types of characters along the way. From a Jungian perspective, the various characters of myth and dream are archetypal forms, and they represent different facets of the hero’s or dreamer’s own personality. The relationship between the hero and the events and characters he or she encounters in myth is analogous to the relationship between the conscious ego and the contents of the collective unconscious. The ego refers to the organization of the conscious mind, composed of the perceptions, memories, thoughts, and feelings of which we are consciously aware. The ego is that with which we "consciously" identify ourselves. Through dreams and active imagination, the collective unconscious tries to communicate to the ego, calling for our consciousness to expand its awareness and realize the hidden potential lying deeper within. The hero functions as the narrative counterpart to the psyche’s ego. Characters and events encountered by the hero represent various forces within the hero’s unconscious. The ultimate goal of the hero is to engage these characters, bringing unconscious archetypes to the surface, and then successfully assimilating them into his or her own psyche.

Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious

Although there are numerous archetypes, Jung found some of the most common reoccurring images in dreams and myth to be the self, the persona, the shadow, and the anima/animus. The self is the central archetype and functions as the organizing principle of the personality, representing order and unification. This archetype does not become
evident until about middle age when the personality is more fully developed through individuation. The *persona* is a conformity archetype, enabling a person to wear masks and portray a character that is not necessarily his or her own true nature. It provides an important survival function, allowing us to adapt to different social circumstances, but can also be dangerous if we too closely identify our ego with a particular persona rather than the self. The *shadow*, represented by images of the same gender as the dreamer, reflects the basic instinctual drives and animalistic nature of humans. This archetype is the most potentially dangerous form, but also carries the most potential for creative expression.

The *anima* represents the feminine elements in the male unconscious, while the *animus* is the masculine elements of the female unconscious. The anima/animus archetypes are responsible for our unconscious predispositions toward members of the opposite sex, and represent the possible expression of masculine energy in woman and feminine energy in men.6

Although these archetypes exist within the human unconscious, their energy is felt through the very real interpersonal relationships of human life. As Jungian scholars Calvin Hall and Vernon Nordby note,

> The comparison between intrapsychic conflicts and interpersonal conflicts is not just an analogy...because, as Jung points out, our conflicts with other people are often, if not always, projections of conflicts within our own personality. A husband who fights with his wife is fighting his own anima. A person who campaigns vigorously, even fanatically, against what he regards as sin and immorality is fighting his own shadow.7

Thus, the power of archetypal energy is not simply existing in the mind but is physically and emotionally experienced.

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Basic archetypal forms and their interactions can be expressed in dream and myth through thousands of different characters, each wearing a different costume. Furthermore, an archetype can also be presented through an event as well as a character, because the essence of the archetype is its function, not its outward form. Despite the wide variety of archetypal characters, their referent remains the same: they each function to represent some aspect of the person's own unconscious psyche. As I have said, the goal of individuation is to fully differentiate each aspect of the psyche, represented by the different archetypes, and integrate these energies into a coherent fully functioning personality. Portrayed in myth, the hero's goal is to assimilate the energies of the various characters encountered in the journey into his or her own personality. Only then can the hero successfully achieve the adventure.

The Archetypes of Myth and Film

Inspired by Jung's study of these forms, Campbell has outlined some of the basic archetypal images as they appear in heroic adventures of mythology. The hero is the pivotal character who lives in a state of unrest which can only be changed by successfully completing the adventure. Although the hero is analogous to the conscious ego, it is the archetype of the "self" which lies behind the hero's motivation toward individuation through the completion of his or her journey. It is within the hero that psychic conflict initially exists. The particular state of that conflict and the potential for its resolution is portrayed through the relationship between the hero and the other events and characters of the narrative, particularly in the hero's relationship to the shadow and the anima/animus characters.

8In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1949), Campbell discusses the various functions of the archetypal characters of myth while outlining several stories which follow the basic structure of the "monomyth."
The shadow, usually depicted through characters of the same sex as the hero, often presents the greatest obstacle with which the hero must battle in order to succeed. Representing the animal instincts of the hero, the energy of the shadow is the most potentially destructive and the most potentially creative force to be reckoned with. In a Greek myth told by Aeschylus, the shadow energy of Prometheus is represented by Zeus. Prometheus manifests the positive side of this shadow energy by stealing fire from Zeus, and giving it as a gift to humanity. The negative side is illustrated through Zeus’ wrathful punishment of Prometheus. King Arthur’s shadow is represented by his own illegitimate son, Mordred, who has the potential for carrying Arthur’s dream to the next generation, but who ultimately brings a tragic end to Arthur’s round table. In both of these myths, there is a strong instinctual drive toward power (to be God or King), but this drive is tempered by compassion (illustrated through Prometheus’ gift of fire and Arthur’s establishment of justice). When the power of the shadow can be harnessed in a positive way, it can be the source of inspiration and creativity; when it remains undifferentiated, the shadow is profoundly destructive.

In motion pictures, the shadow often appears as the primary antagonist whose energy must be embraced in a positive way by the hero. For instance, in An Officer and a Gentleman, the drill sergeant appears as the primary antagonist who brings out the best and the worst in Mayo, the central character. It is only by assimilating the sergeant’s power that Mayo himself can ultimately become an officer. In The Wizard of Oz, Dorothy’s destruction of two witches gives her the power, and the magic shoes, necessary to complete her own adventure. In Return of the Jedi, Luke Skywalker demonstrates the successful integration of his own shadow through the transformation of Darth Vader from a machine-man to a human being. Whether destroyed or transformed, the hero’s task is always to incorporate the shadow’s power into his or her own life in a positive way.
Closely related to the shadow in narrative function, the anima/animus archetypes also can relate antagonistically toward the hero. To achieve integration and complete the adventure, heroes often must deal with issues represented by characters of the opposite sex. These conflicts are often played out through romantic relationships: Rachel Lapp as John Book's anima in *Witness*; Jack Colton as Joan Wilder's animus in *Romancing the Stone*. However, such issues can also be expressed through non-romantic relationships between men and women such as the multifaceted interaction between Hannibal Lector and Clarice in *Silence of the Lambs* or Dorothy's relationship both to the Wizard and her three male companions along the road to Oz. Princess Leia represents several different aspects of Luke's anima, relating to him sometimes as his superior, at other times as his love interest, and still at other times as a nurturing Mother figure. Ultimately, she is symbolically assimilated into Luke's psyche as his sister.

Regardless of whether the interaction is romantic or not, the relationship between the hero and his or her anima/animus is played out as a potential "psychological" marriage. In his essay "Marriage as a Psychological Relationship," Jung states,

> All the powers that strive for unity, all healthy desire for selfhood, will resist the disintegration, and in this way he will become conscious of the possibility of an inner integration, which before he had always sought outside himself. He will then find his rewards in an undivided self.⁹

Thus, through relations to characters of the opposite sex, the hero must adequately unify the energies of his or her psychic opposite in order to be fully integrated.

While the above mentioned forms constitute the primary archetypes, other minor characters also perform significant archetypal functions. Typically, the hero is called to adventure by some character or event functioning as a *herald*. The herald signals that something is wrong with the ordinary world, and challenges the hero to do something about it. Luke Skywalker is called to adventure when a robot, R2D2, inadvertently

projects a holographic message. Whether or not the challenge issued by the herald is immediately accepted, a mentor figure will usually appear to give the hero important advice on how the adventure can be achieved. The wise old Obi Wan Kanobi and Jedi master Yoda provide this function for Luke. Threshold guardians often stand between the hero and some important task he or she must perform, such as the various monsters who appear at the Cantina before Luke leaves his home planet. Shapeshifters appear to confuse the hero on the path. For instance, Han Solo is seen at various times as a hero and at other times as a scoundrel, making it uncertain whether or not he is ultimately trustworthy. Tricksters appear as clowns, but provide important information for the hero who is able to see through their comic masks. Pretending to be a fool rather than a Jedi master, Yoda wears the trickster mask when he is first encountered by Luke.

Catharsis with the Hero

Within any mythological story, the hero must overcome the obstacles and assimilate the gifts presented by these characters and events. Yet, by way of identification with the hero and his or her adventure, the audience vicariously participates in the same process. This basic point has been recognized since Aristotle's assessment of Greek drama in his Poetics. As we watch a dramatic play on screen or stage, we may experience what Aristotle calls a catharsis (a cleansing or purging) of our emotions. This emotional connection between audience and hero is what inspires us to feel anger, fear, joy, grief, and compassion along with the characters of the story. Their successes feel like our successes; their failures are ours as well.

The strong connection we feel to the hero is based in our shared experience of archetypal forms. In our daily lives we are presented with the same psychosocial conflicts and challenges which face the hero along the way. Within our own unconscious exists the same cast of characters, the archetypes, which aid or obstruct the hero on the way to his or her goal. For the hero to truly help us in our own journey, we must not only identify with his or her adventure as acted out on stage or screen; we must also see ourselves acting out our own metaphorical journey. As Campbell states,

...we have not even to risk the adventure alone; for the heroes of all time have gone before us; the labyrinth is thoroughly known; we have only to follow the thread of the hero-path. And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god; where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence; where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world.\footnote{Campbell, \textit{The Hero with a Thousand Faces}, p. 25.}

In so doing, we may experience a catharsis within our own psyches, allowing the repressed energies of the unconscious to flow into consciousness, expanding our awareness and more fully realizing our potential.

Summary

In Part I of this essay, I have tried to demonstrate the potential merits of a mythographical method of motion picture criticism. While several scholars have embraced some form of mythography in their analysis of movies, I am primarily following those who have used Campbell and Jung as a foundation for their methods. As such, my focus is on analyzing the structure of a film in relationship to the monomythic pattern of the hero's journey, and on uncovering the archetypal function of central characters, events, and images within the narrative. To more fully illustrate these points, in Part II of this essay I apply my methodology to an analysis of Terry Gilliam's \textit{The Fisher King}. With this
analysis, I hope to further demonstrate the contributions that a mythographical methodology can bring to cinema studies.
PART II

THE GRAIL COMES TO NEW YORK
CHAPTER 5

TERRY GILLIAM'S THE FISHER KING

In applying a mythographical methodology, it is tempting to begin this analysis with a discussion of the narrative structure and themes of the medieval Grail legend, and then demonstrate how *The Fisher King* reflects certain aspects of the traditional myth. However, such an approach would be backwards, because the purpose is not to analyze the ancient myth itself, but to show what aspects of that particular myth, and of mythology in general, are expressed through *The Fisher King*. Here I am following Northrop Frye's caution that "the axioms and postulates of criticism...have to grow out of the art it deals with." Thus, the point of departure should be the film itself. I begin in this chapter by discussing the initial critical reaction to *The Fisher King*. In subsequent chapters, I compare the overall structure of *The Fisher King* to the structure of the medieval Grail legend, and reveal the archetypal function of the central images in both stories.

Critical Reception of *The Fisher King*

When *The Fisher King* was released in the Fall of 1991, it was met with generally mixed reviews. Richard Alleva panned the film, claiming that "it keeps turning into other movies, each more stale than the last." Geoff Brown was equally critical, calling the story "an unwieldy narrative, alternately garbled and contrived, cluttered with diversions of dubious effect." Other critics were not quite so cruel, voicing a generally positive assessment, albeit with some reservations. David Ansen wrote that "*The Fisher King*
veers with great assurance from wild comedy to feverish fantasy, robust romanticism and tough realism—with only an occasional stumble." Similar sentiments were expressed by Richard Corliss: "Some big emotional moments are bungled or botched...A million reservations notwithstanding, I liked the *The Fisher King*. How about you?" Others, such as Edmond Grant, were less ambivalent with their praise: "the film resolves down to some wonderfully imaginative and refreshingly controlled fantasy work." Despite the mixed opinions among critics, *The Fisher King* did receive its share of honors and awards: it won the top prize at the 1991 Toronto Film Festival; actress Mercedes Ruehl won the Academy Award and Golden Globe award for best supporting actress; Robin Williams was nominated for an Academy Award for best actor; and Richard LaGravenese's screenplay was nominated for an Academy Award.

It is obvious that not everyone likes Gilliam's version of the *The Fisher King*. And this is an important point, because the style with which a story is told can also be a reflection of the artist's intuitive understanding of his or her audience: the artist who is truly connected with the psyche of a culture intuitively knows the appropriate style to best communicate mythic ideas. However, it should also be noted that, according to Jung, Western culture since the Middle Ages has been characterized by a repression of the intuitive and the feeling functions of the psyche, especially within males. These mental functions are vital for our ability to appreciate products of the human imagination. Through its stylistic mixture of fantasy and reality, *The Fisher King* makes its primary appeal to the intuitive and feeling aspects of personality. Perhaps, for some of us, the pleasure we experience from the story is its appeal to these repressed functions of our

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4 David Ansen, "The Holy Grail in the Unholy City," *Newsweek* 23 September, 1991, p. 57
lives; however, for the same reason many of us may dislike the story, because we are uncomfortable with such appeals to the mental functions we are working so diligently to repress.

Nevertheless, this essay is not primarily concerned with the relative effectiveness with which *The Fisher King* communicates its message to this or that person; the fact that a relatively large number of people have seen and enjoyed the story is enough to give it serious consideration. Furthermore, when the film is analyzed from the perspective of mythographical criticism, we can better understand the "truths" expressed by the story apart from the particular stylistic nuances of the filmmaker. Indeed, the significance of the film's mythic motifs has been recognized by some of the reviewers I have already mentioned. David Ansen wrote that the film is "an attempt to translate the myth of the Holy Grail to the harsh realities of contemporary New York," and that "the theme of Richard LaGravenese's rich, quirky script is redemption." Similarly, Geoff Brown suggested that, "at the heart of Richard LaGravenese's script is a curious, small, potentially touching tale of wastrel Jack's redemption at the hands of visionary derelict Parry (playing Fool to Jack's Fisher King): two outcasts from the myths of time conquering late twentieth-century adversity." While neither of these critics, nor any others of which I am aware, explore the film's mythic themes in any detail or depth, such comments concerning the mythological elements of *The Fisher King* do foreshadow my own mythographical analysis of the film.

As my analysis will demonstrate, *The Fisher King*, in terms of structure and theme, reflects certain aspects of the medieval Grail legend, expressing motifs that are at the same time of universal and local significance. The film reflects the basic pattern of the heroic journey, following a man through a mid-life crisis in which he: 1) is separated from the

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9 Ansen, p. 57.
10 Brown, p. 43
ordinary world with which he is familiar; 2) is initiated into a strange otherworld in which he learns the secrets of his redemption; and 3) is successful in achieving the goal of the adventure and in bestowing the boons of his success upon others. Within this monomythic narrative structure, the hero encounters characters who function as the universal archetypes found in myth and dream, challenging the hero to assimilate their own energies into his psyche. Although its structure and imagery reflect universal patterns of myth, the story itself addresses particular local concerns that are relevant to contemporary American society.
CHAPTER 6

STAGE I: SEPARATION FROM THE ORDINARY WORLD

The Fisher King

Christopher Vogler suggests, "a title is an important clue to the nature of the story... a good title can become a multi-leveled metaphor for the condition of the hero or his world." The opening title, The Fisher King, immediately connects the motion picture we are seeing to the medieval Grail legend. Although there are several versions of the medieval story, all of them share some basic characteristics. In their Jungian influenced study of the Grail myth, Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz offer the following outline of the story, based on a comparison of several renditions of the myth:

A mysterious, life-preserving and sustenance-dispensing object or vessel is guarded by a King in a castle that is difficult to find. The King is either lame or sick and the surrounding country is devastated. The King can only be restored to health if a knight of conspicuous excellence finds the castle and at the first sight there asks a certain question. Should he neglect to put this question, then everything will remain as before, the castle will vanish and the knight will have to set out once more upon the search. Should he finally succeed, after much wandering and many adventures, in finding the Grail Castle again, and should he then ask the question, the King will be restored to health, the land will begin to grow green, and the hero will become the guardian of the Grail from that time on.

Although the title does not reveal the specific ways in which the film will embrace elements of the medieval story, the opening words clearly relate the film to that legend and therefore imply that the narrative will revolve around two important points: 1) a man (the

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Fisher King), who is the guardian of something sacred (the Grail), is wounded and cannot restore himself to health; 2) a second man (the knight Perceval), who proves himself to be worthy of the sacred object, finally succeeds in restoring the wounded man to health and becomes the guardian of the sacred object himself.

With these implications arising out of the title of the story, we are initially confronted with several key questions: Who, in this story, is the wounded Fisher King? What is the nature of his wound? Who will be the knight deemed worthy to heal the King? How will the knight accomplish this healing? The Fisher King answers all of these questions throughout the course of the narrative. Apart from the title, however, the story does not initially make any specific references to the medieval legend itself; rather, it begins by establishing the hero within the context of his "ordinary world"--New York City.

The Ordinary World of the Hero

Following the title, the story begins by introducing us to the nature of the particular world in which the narrative will unfold. This is the first stage of the monomythic pattern of the hero's journey. The ordinary world of the hero must be established before we can understand what is at stake in his or her adventure. In the Fisher King, the story begins by acclimating us into the glitzy life of a New York City radio celebrity: Jack Lucas.

The Story

Jack Lucas is a celebrated "shock jock" in New York City. He is arrogant and abusive to the callers of his radio talk show, treating them like playthings for his own amusement. He is insensitive to the bums he encounters on the street, and he ignores the feelings of his attractive young girlfriend with whom he lives in an immaculate high-rise apartment. Yet, Jack's radio success has landed him the opportunity to audition for the lead role in a television sit-com, aptly entitled "On the Radio." Jack Lucas possesses great wealth and fame, but his self-centeredness and greed drive him to want more.
Messages from the Unconscious: The Archetypes

The hero is the ego of the film's personality, and, as such, the person with whom the audience is invited to identify. As the central character of The Fisher King, Jack Lucas is the story's ego: the pivot around which all the other characters revolve. However, what motivates the hero to embark on his journey is the archetype of the self. The unconscious psychic energy of the self archetype challenges the hero to integrate the undifferentiated aspects of his or her personality. In the opening sequences of The Fisher King, we are given important visual and verbal clues concerning what aspects of the hero's undifferentiated psyche will be addressed in the narrative. These clues concern Jack's relations to his own shadow, persona, and anima.

A crucial image in the opening scene shows the shadow of Jack Lucas on the wall of the radio soundroom. His silhouette is surrounded by bars. In a less than subtle way, we are being told that the archetypal shadow energy of Jack Lucas is imprisoned in his unconscious. Recall that the shadow archetype represents our basic instinctual nature and is both the most potentially dangerous and potentially creative aspect of personality. When not allowed to be released in constructive ways, the shadow strikes back with violent destructiveness. The shadow of Jack Lucas surrounded by bars is a potent visual image, foreshadowing a fundamental psychic conflict with which the hero will have to contend.

We see another revealing image in the fourth scene as Jack rehearses for his sit-com audition while sitting in a bathtub wearing a cosmetic mud-mask on his face. In this very obvious fashion, we see that an essential problem with Jack Lucas involves his relationship to the persona archetype, illustrated by his wearing the mask while otherwise naked. The persona allows us to play various social roles and act in ways that may not be expressive of our true nature; however, when the ego too strongly identifies with one aspect of the
persona, we suffer from what Jung calls inflation. In such a case, "the persona-ridden person becomes alienated from his nature, and lives in a state of tension because of the conflict between his overdeveloped persona and the underdeveloped parts of his personality." Jack's inflated persona is illustrated by his drive for power and desire for fame, both of which are by-products of the over-identification with his role as a radio shock-jock. We see this in Jack's disdainful treatment of other people, his arrogant confidence that he will win the sit-com role, and his grandiose musings about the title of his biography. Although Jack's over-developed persona has allowed him great success in terms of wealth and fame, it has come at the cost of repressing other vital aspects of personality. This fatal flaw will return to haunt him.

A third clue concerning the psychic conflict within Jack Lucas is suggested by a brief scene we witness between him and his girlfriend. During this encounter, he completely ignores her needs and desires, drawing all of the attention toward himself. Here we see the underdeveloped nature of Jack's anima. His inability to relate to her is symbolic of his own repression of the feminine aspects of his personality. This is perhaps the most revealing clue that Jack's psyche exists in an unhealthy state, because the integration of psychic opposites is very often illustrated in myth by the successful "marriage" of an archetypal anima/animus character with its psychic opposite.

Along with these images in the first few scenes of the story, we are also given important asynchronous verbal clues, like subtle messages from the unconscious, that all is not well with Jack's current state of affairs. During the opening titles, lyrics to the background music are suggestive: "Hit the road Jack, and don't you come back no more." The road Jack needs to hit is the same one traveled by all mythological heros: a road that will take him to the deepest reaches of his own psyche. There he will meet the cast of

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characters who represent the exact nature of his imprisonment: his own undifferentiated anima, his inflated persona and his repressed shadow. These are the same characters who can, if successfully assimilated, bring about Jack's salvation. Of course, Jack is totally unaware of his troubled psychological state, signing off from his talk show with the ego-driven words, "Thank God I'm me." In the background we hear music expressive of Jack's conscious attitude: "I've got the power." As yet, he is unable to hear the unconscious message to "hit the road."

The Hero as Cultural Metaphor

In Part I, I suggested, along with other writers, that motion pictures can function to reveal issues concerning the nature of our social or cultural psyche. In this sense, Jack Lucas can be seen as representing some of the values and problems that characterize American society. The social problem of the inflated persona is marked by America's obsession with celebrities in sports and entertainment. Addressing this issue, Joseph Campbell remarks,

A questionnaire was once sent around one of the high schools in Brooklyn which asked, "What would you like to be?" Two thirds of the students responded, "A celebrity." They had no notion of having to give of themselves in order to achieve something...Just to be known, to have fame-name and fame.

The drive for "name and fame" is what fuels the ego of The Fisher King's hero. This obsession in American society is most clearly seen in advertising. We do not know the people who are vying for our dollars; we only know what they look like; we only see their masked personas. We are asked to identify with an image, not with a substantive human being. In accepting their offers, we become concerned with image over substance ourselves, associating our own personalities with the masks we wear, rather than the

content of our character. Within the framework of The Fisher King myth, this unauthentic existence eventually contributes to the downfall of Jack Lucas.

Secondly, Jack's undifferentiated anima is also a reflection of our society's attempts to deal with gender issues, or, in other words, the anima of society. At this point in the story, there is nothing exclusively contemporary about Jack's ignoring his anima; the subjugation of woman in our primarily patriarchal Western culture is well documented. Thus, we should only note that the problem exists, because the film itself does not, as yet, reveal the particular nature of the conflict. The fact that anima issues are of importance to our society is reflected in the many feminist movements which have emerged over the past four decades as a response to the hierarchical and dualistic nature of patriarchal cultures. Later in the story, we will become more familiar with the particular anima issues expressed in The Fisher King.

Finally, the repression of Jack's shadow reflects a particularly problematic issue for our society. Jung has pointed out that "the modern world provides inadequate opportunities for the shadow archetype to become individuated." Reflecting upon World War I, Jung writes that when the shadow is repressed,

...the animal in us only becomes more beastlike...that is no doubt the reason why no religion is so defiled with the spilling of innocent blood as Christianity, and why the world has never seen a bloodier war than the war of the Christian nations.

Here, Jung is implying that the Christian religion does not allow adequate expression of the shadow, the basic instinctual nature of humanity. The backlash of a repressed shadow

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6For an introduction to feminist interpretations of religion and mythology, see Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-talk (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983).
7Of particular relevance to this study are the feminist writers who have addressed issues of myth and ritual. See Estella Lauter, Women as Mythmakers: Poetry and Visual Art by Twentieth-Century Women (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984) Carol Pearson, Awakening the Heroes Within (San Francisco: Harper, 1991).
8Hill and Nordby, p. 83.
is emotionally charged and often violent. In our own society, we see the signs of such violence all around us: terrorist bombings, drive-by shootings, child molestation, to name only a few. As we shall soon see, *The Fisher King* also bears testimony to the destructive potential of the shadow.

**The Catalyst for Adventure**

Having become acclimated to the ordinary world of the hero, we are soon given glimpses of the precise problems and potential conflicts that need to be addressed by the hero. Here we begin to see the archetypal images take on a clearer form, and the conflict between opposing forces is further developed. In most stories, something provides a catalyst through which the central conflict begins to emerge. In a psychological context, the catalyst for one's descent into the unconscious is typically some extreme emotional response to stress or trauma. For Jack Lucas, the catalyst comes from an unexpected reaction to his own insensitive comments over the radio.

**The Story**

Jack's dreams of power and celebrity come to an abrupt halt when he makes some flippant remarks over the radio. Edwin, one of Jack's regular callers, reveals that he is falling for a girl he met at an upscale restaurant called "Babbits." Jack derides Edwin, telling him to stay away from such Yuppie scum. "Yuppies are evil...they must be stopped before it's too late...it's us or them." Edwin takes Jack's words to heart; he enters the restaurant with a shot-gun, kills seven people, and then turns the gun on himself. As a result, Jack is overcome with guilt for his role in the tragic shooting, and he descends into an emotional abyss, losing his job, his wealth, and his fame.

**Intrapsychic Conflict**

Conflict is the essence of drama: human beings vs. nature; an individual vs. society; two individuals dueling with one another. However, from a Jungian viewpoint, all such
conflicts are essentially an outward expression of the battles being fought within everyone's own psyche. In this sense, the ultimate battle is an intrapsychic conflict fought within the hero's own self. Jack's conversation with Edwin makes evident his own psychic conflict. His comments about the "evil Yuppies" can be interpreted as unconscious descriptions of Jack himself. "They don't feel love," says Jack, "they only negotiate love moments." But as the story develops it becomes painfully obvious that Jack is the one who is unable to feel love: not for his girlfriend; not for his radio guests; not for the bums he encounters on the street. From his position as a radio personality, Jack possesses power, but he utterly lacks compassion. The ultimate expression of Jack's insensitive abuse of his own power is when he flippantly tells Edwin that the "Yuppies must be stopped before it's too late. It's us or them." Edwin takes Jack's words literally. Here Edwin becomes the outward expression of Jack's undifferentiated shadow, violently reacting to its repression.

Jack's conversation with Edwin also establishes an important theme about the role of "fantasy"--Jack sarcastically makes reference to Pinocchio, suggesting that the fairy tale is not a true story. The story of Pinocchio (here I am specifically referring to Disney's version) is about a little wooden puppet who, after saving his creator/father from the belly of a whale, is granted life. Following the monomythic pattern of the hero's journey, it is a story about growing up, about becoming "human" in a psychological sense, symbolically rendered through the death and rebirth experience of passing through the whale. With reference to the "belly of the whale" motif, Campbell writes,

The idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth is symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale. The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died...The hero whose attachment to ego is already annihilate passes back and forth across the horizons of the world, in and out of the dragon, as readily as a king through all the rooms of his house. And therein lies his power to save; for his passing and returning demonstrate that through all
the contraries of phenomenal-ity the Uncreate-Imperishable remains, and
there is nothing to fear. While Jack denies the truth of such fantasies, he has no idea that he will soon embark on a
similar fantastic journey. At this point, his denial of the story's truth reflects his own
denial of the self archetype. Rejecting the unconscious impulse toward achieving psychic
balance and wholeness, Jack is in prime condition for the backlash of his shadow,
represented by Edwin. However, the energy of the self archetype does not go away; the
Pinocchio motif reoccurs throughout The Fisher King as an ongoing reminder of Jack's
possible redemption.

The particular nature of Jack's quest for redemption is also foreshadowed in the first
few scenes of the story. Just prior to hearing about Edwin's shooting spree from a
televised news report, Jack had been rehearsing the lines for his sit-com audition. While
covering his face with a mud mask (symbol of the inflated persona), Jack continually
repeats the phrase "forgive me." In the sit-com, this line is supposed to be comic;
however, after learning about Edwin's rampage, seeking forgiveness becomes the
overriding theme of Jack Lucas' existence. Jack's bane becomes the guilt he feels for his
role in the violence. With the tragedy at "Babbits," the ordinary world of Jack has been
forever changed, and he now begins a journey into a world which was previously
unknown to him: a world of madness and fantasy--the only world from which Jack can
find his salvation.

The Call to Adventure

The beginning of the hero's adventure, his or her departure from the ordinary world,
is sometimes an act of volition; sometimes the adventure thrusts itself upon the hero with
or without any consent. Whatever the case, some person or event will issue a "call" for

the hero to set forth upon the journey. The first step of Jack's adventure is an unwilling fall from riches to rags.

The Story

Three years later Jack is living in a shoddy apartment with a new girlfriend, Anne, and he works as her assistant in a video rental store. Anne cares deeply for Jack, but he is unable to return her affection, and at times even makes her a target for the expression of his own anger. Certain that he is being punished for his sins, Jack is a miserable drunkard who despises having to face people, and resents those who have succeeded where he has failed. In a drunken stupor, Jack tries to escape his problems by strapping a cement block to his leg and jumping into a river. Before he can jump, he is attacked and beaten by two young thugs who think he is a street person living under the bridge. Just as the thugs pour gasoline on him, preparing to burn him alive, Jack is saved by a homeless psychotic named Parry who believes himself to be a gallant knight.

The Shadow Archetype: Jack's Guilt

Here we begin to see the consequences of the shadow's outburst. Jack's shadow energy begins to take specific form as anger and guilt. Christopher Vogler's comments concerning this archetype are apropos to Jack's condition:

The Shadow can represent the power of repressed feelings. Deep trauma or guilt can fester when exiled to the darkness of the unconscious, and emotions hidden or denied can turn into something monstrous that wants to destroy us. \(^{11}\)

Jack is consumed with guilt for his role in Edwin's murderous rampage. As a result, he lives in his own self-imposed prison, harboring feelings of anger for others and loathing for himself. He is totally unable to function in society, and his only relief comes from an escape into inebriation.

\(^{11}\) Vogler, p. 83.
While Edwin constitutes the first representation of Jack's shadow, a second representative appears in the form of another celebrity: the man who ultimately received the sit-com role for which Jack was preparing to audition. Thus, Jack has a weekly reminder of his past when "On the Radio" appears on television, or when a person in the video store innocently comments on how funny the star of the show is when he says "forgive me." At this point in the story, Jack appears incapable of escaping the shadow of his past, and his only way of dealing with the repressed shadow is to escape through alcohol.

The Anima Archetype: Anne

Despite Jack's pitiful state, his girlfriend Anne continually tries to offer emotional support and encouragement. Symbolically, Anne functions as Jack's anima, his repressed feminine energy. She wears several different masks, relating to Jack on a variety of levels: as his employer/superior; as his caretaker/mother figure; as his lover and potential bride. Discussing the role of "woman" in heroic mythologies, Campbell writes

Woman, in the picture language of mythology, represents the totality of what can be known. The hero is the one who comes to know. As he progresses in the slow initiation which is life, the form of the goddess undergoes for him a series of transfigurations: she can never be greater than himself, though she can always promise more than he is yet capable of comprehending. She lures, she guides, she bids him burst his fetters. And if he can match her import, the two, the knower and the known, will be released from every limitation. Woman is the guide to the sublime acme of sensuous adventure...The hero who can take her as she is, without undue commotion but with the kindness and assurance she requires, is potentially the king, the incarnate god, of her created world.\footnote{Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, p. 116.}

As the symbol of feminine elements in Jack's psyche, Anne challenges Jack to accept his natural capacity for romantic love (the role of lover/bride), to forgive himself (the role of caretaker/mother), and to take some responsibility in his work (the role of...
employer/superior). Taken as a whole, Anne corresponds to the mythological Chthonic Mother or Earth Goddess. Indeed, Anne does appear as a very natural or "earthy" person. Symbolically, Anne's appeal to the "natural" side of Jack directly conflicts with his unnatural persona.

Anne also portrays a mentor function, revealing to Jack the essence of what he needs to do. First of all, she tells Jack that he "thinks" too much, revealing the overdevelopment of his mental "thinking" function and the underdevelopment of his "feeling" function. This also reflects an overall societal problem which Jung has observed. Jung characterizes our culture as overvaluing the attitude of extraversion and the functions of thinking and sensing while repressing the attitude of introversion as well as the feeling and intuitive functions. Hall and Nordby describe the potential problems when one represses the feeling side of nature:

He may appear to others as being impersonal, or even cold and haughty. If repression is too strict feeling is forced to find devious and sometimes abnormal ways of affecting his character. He may become autocratic, bigoted, vain, superstitious, and impervious to criticism.

This quote is an appropriate description of the current state of Jack's personality. Anne's comments constitute an appeal by Jack's feeling function to be allowed its due expression. Later in the story, we will discover the exact nature of feeling that Jack is required to embrace.

Anne further reveals her role as Jack's mentor when she explains to him her theory that man was created in the Devil's image, and woman was created in God's image. The whole purpose of life, Anne claims, is for men and women to get married, so that God and the Devil can work it all out. This reveals a distinctly Jungian perspective which claims that the conflict between consciousness and the unconscious can be transcended and

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13 Hall and Nordby, p. 107.
14 Hall and Nordby, p. 101-102.
reconciled through the union of opposing psychic energies. At this stage in his journey, Jack is completely unable to comprehend the significance of Anne’s message.

Thus, held by the shackles of his past, Jack remains incapable of either loving himself or others; in other words, he is incapable of experiencing psychological marriage with the Goddess. Her inability to reach Jack is a source of constant frustration for Anne. Jack, in turn, is irritated by her efforts to help him, and rejects the idea of marriage. In effect, in refusing this symbolic union with Anne, Jack is essentially rejecting the vital aspects of his feminine side, and the possibility of psychic integration.

The Herald: Pinocchio

In dreams and myths, certain characters or events function to announce the coming of significant change. Such announcements are the role of the archetypal herald figure. The herald functions "as a preliminary manifestation of the powers that are breaking into play; the crisis of his appearance is the 'call to adventure.'" For Jack Lucas, the herald is none other than Pinocchio himself.

After watching an episode of "On the Radio," and angrily lashing out at Anne, Jack finds himself stumbling drunk on the street, hearing voices from his haunting past. In this scene, the stylistic elements of the film reveal that we are entering the mythological realm. Wide-angle lenses, low-key lighting, and tilted off-center camera angles all combine to create a surrealistic environment. Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz note the significance of this dream-like setting as it appears in myth: "That our hero is about to set foot into an otherworldly domain is indicated by the change in atmosphere which, in contrast to that of previous events, now becomes magical." In this magical setting, a small boy approaches Jack, refers to him as "Mr. Bum," and hands him a Pinocchio doll.

16Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, p. 51
17Emma Jung and von Franz, p. 66.
This event recalls Jack's remarks to Edwin that he should not believe in such fairy tales. It also announces that some significant change is forthcoming. Indeed, though he remains unaware, Jack's life is about to become overwhelmed with the world of fairy tale and myth, and consequently, be whisked away into the deep realms of his own unconscious psyche. It is significant that by the end of this scene, Jack has embraced the Pinocchio doll, speaking to it endearingly as though it were his friend. Here we see the beginning of Jack's engaging his unconscious.

Approaching the Unconscious

Having tied the Pinocchio doll to his leg, Jack prepares to drown himself when his shadow once again emerges. This time, the violence is brought by two thugs who are committed to driving out the bums from their neighborhood. As they douse Jack with gasoline, preparing to burn him, a homeless bum appears who proclaims, "In the name of Blancheflor, unhand that errant knight." Shooting one of the thugs in the genitals with a toy arrow, the bum, whose name we later discover to be Parry, lets them "feel the sting of his shaft." While rescuing Jack from the thugs, and from his own suicide, Parry reveals to us a symbol of Jack's potential ultimate salvation. By appealing to "Blancheflor" (the woman who becomes Perceval's bride), Parry has brought us face to face with imagery from the Grail legend. Through Parry's connection with this myth, Jack himself will be forced to encounter archetypal images that occur both within the myth itself and within his own unconscious.

As we shall see, Parry will represent several crucial aspects of Jack's unconscious psyche. Understanding himself to be an heroic knight, Parry is appealing to the self archetype, calling for an integration of the disparate aspects of Jack's personality. Furthermore, Parry will reflect the positive aspects of Jack's shadow, illustrated through his continual references to basic aspects of our instinctual nature: sex, food, and
defecation. Finally, through Parry's own quest to discover his "Blancheflor," he will direct Jack toward a more positive relationship with his anima.

Thus, at this point, we can begin to answer the questions which were originally raised from the title, *The Fisher King*. Jack Lucas appears as the Fisher King. At the beginning of the story, Jack's media success portrays him as a "king"; however, he inspires his subjects to kill rather than create. His realm, like the king's land in the medieval legend, is a "waste land," devoid of any fertility. The state of the land is a reflection of the spiritual condition of the king himself. In the medieval legend, the Fisher King is castrated, having been wounded by the lance of a heathen knight. Jack's total inability to relate positively to Anne or to function within society is symbolic of his own castration: he has been cut off from his creativity and generativity. The sacred objects over which Jack guards are the contents of his unconscious: his repressed "feeling" function; his undifferentiated shadow; his neglected anima. Parry appears as the knight Perceval. Only through feeling the sting of Parry's "shaft" will Jack be able to reclaim his own creative nature. Here we are given general clues about the adventure to come, although we do not know as yet the precise nature of the journey.

The hero now departs from the setting of his ordinary world. We have become familiar with the particular set of problems that face the ordinary world of the hero, and we understand why he or she must make essential changes in order that this world might be transformed. Thus, the hero leaves home, and begins the descent into the strange "otherworld." In this new place the hero will come face to face with the archetypal forms which haunt him; the same archetypes which provide the keys to his salvation.
CHAPTER 7

STAGE II: INITIATION INTO THE "OTHERWORLD"

Mythic Descent

The second stage of the monomythic pattern is the hero's descent into the "otherworld," a place totally alien to the everyday world of the hero. In psychological terms, it represents a conscious effort to embrace the messages from the unconscious. In myths, the otherworld is a place where the hero encounters a different landscape, strange characters, and challenging events. In Fisher King, the once famous and wealthy Jack Lucas approaches his own unconscious by entering the surreal world of singing indigents and delusional questing knights.

The Story

Parry tries to enlist Jack into his Don Quixote-like quest for the holy Grail. The Grail that Parry seeks is actually a cup which sits on a trophy case in the mansion of a fifth avenue billionaire. Jack refuses to engage in the whimsies of this mentally ill indigent, until he discovers the cause of Parry's psychosis: Parry was present at Babbit's on the night of Edwin's shooting spree, and he had witnessed the violent death of his beautiful wife. Formerly, Parry had been a college professor of literature, having written his dissertation on the medieval Grail legend. Since the tragedy at Babbits, Parry has completely shut himself off from his former life, and now lives in an hallucinatory fantasy dominated by the themes and images of medieval knights and their quests. However, whenever something happens to reactivate his memory about the past, Parry encounters a horrifying vision of a Red Knight which sends him into seizure-like convulsions.
The Grail

The Grail is the central symbol of the Fisher King myth. In the medieval legend, the Grail is usually understood to be the cup from which Jesus drank at the Last Supper and that was used to collect drops of his blood at the crucifixion. It became a symbol of the highest spiritual principles attainable by human beings. Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz suggest that the Grail itself "signifies the whole psychic man (not his ego) as a realization of divinity reaching right down into matter." Thus, the Grail is an extension of the Christ image through which we see a union of opposite forces: humanity united with God; temporality with eternity; finitude with infinity; earth with sky. To embrace the Grail is to embrace the essence of the self archetype, to become completely integrated, balanced, and whole. Through seeking the Grail, Parry is unconsciously being driven toward his own healing. By inviting Jack to accompany him on the quest, Parry is revealing to Jack the path of his salvation as well.

Parry's Madness

Through Parry's apparent insanity, *The Fisher King* is recognizing an important connection between madness and mythology. Joseph Campbell discusses this point, drawing connections between his own work in mythology and Dr. John Weir Perry's work with schizophrenics:

...from this paper of Dr. Perry I was learning that the same symbolic figures [of mythology] arise spontaneously from the broken-off, tortured state of mind of modern individuals suffering from a complete schizophrenic breakdown: the condition of one who has lost touch with the life and thought of his community and is compulsively fantasizing out of his own completely cut-off base.

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1It should be noted that the nature of the Grail differs among the various traditions. It is sometimes conceived as a cup (Cretian de Troyes); sometimes as a stone (Wolfram von Eshenbach). For a discussion of these various traditions, see Emma Jung and von Franz, *The Grail Legend* (Boston: Sigo Press, 1980), pp. 113-160.
2Emma Jung, and von Franz, p. 159.
In essence, Campbell found that the typical pattern of schizophrenia, in such cases that the madness is eventually healed, is the same as the monomythic hero's journey: separation; initiation; and return. The schizophrenic first experiences a disconnection or departure from society, followed by a retreat into the deep recesses of the psyche. Within the psyche, ill patients will first encounter the terrifying images which have led to the madness, and then, in the most fortunate cases, will encounter the centering, harmonizing unconscious forces which will lead them toward health, returning them to a settled state of mind, and a newfound ability to relate to the larger society.

With regard to the treatment of schizophrenia, Dr. Perry believes that "in certain cases the best thing is to let the schizophrenic process run its course, not to abort the psychosis by administering shock treatments and the like, but, on the contrary, to help the process of disintegration and reintegration along." Dr. Perry is embracing Jung's belief that the dreams and fantasies of psychotics are analogous to fragmented myths, and that such dreams are best interpreted by comparison with analogous mythic forms, "so that the disturbed individual may learn to see himself depersonalized in the mirror of the human spirit and discover by analogy the way to his own larger fulfillment." Thus, the patients see themselves as characters within the myth, working out their own problems (with the help of a clinical guide) as they successfully complete the mythic story.

Parry's invitation for Jack to join him on the Grail quest is nothing less than an offer to enter into his own world of madness and myth. In so doing, Jack holds the key to Parry's salvation, and to his own salvation as well. Here the tables have turned, and we see that Parry is also a manifestation of the Fisher King, his wound being the trauma that has brought forth his psychosis. Furthermore, Jack is now challenged to become Perceval, the knight who must prove himself worthy, and then accomplish the task of healing the.

wounded king. As the story progresses, it becomes obvious that the two men need one another in order for each one to become whole, not unlike the opposing forces of the psyche need each other for the personality to be fully integrated.

Mentors and Fools

Just as psychotics need some guide to help them through their illness, hero's often need mentors to guide them in their journey. At different times in the story, Jack and Parry actually function as mentors for each other. Jack tries to help Parry relearn enough social skills to begin associating with people other than his homeless friends. Parry gives Jack the clues he needs to overcome his own emotional turmoil. While Parry is somewhat eager to accept Jack's aid, the fallen hero adamantly rejects the madman's offer to join in the Grail quest. To Jack, Parry's delusional visions of "little fat people" telling him to seek the Grail are simply foolish.

The characterization of Parry as a fool echoes one of the central themes of the traditional Grail story. Under his armour, Perceval wears the clothes of a fool. The knight's foolishness is a reflection of his lack of proper training in knighthood. Consequently, he often makes social blunders and appears foolish to those who rigidly adhere to what is socially acceptable. However, his ultimate success does not rely on conforming to society's expectations of what a knight should be; rather, Perceval is inspired by the dictates of his own inner nature. Through following his own heart, rather than the rules of society, Perceval's accomplishments exceed those of all the other properly trained knights. In the motif of the "wise fool," the Grail legend suggests that redemption comes not from authority figures or social elites; it comes from one who is deemed foolish by normative society. The fool challenges the norms of society, offering an alternative viewpoint that seems strange to anyone who is simply following the common values of the day. Parry's foolishness can be interpreted in this light. Although
his invitation for Jack to enter his imaginary world seems foolish to Jack, it has important psychological implications; it can be seen as a message from the hero's unconscious, beckoning him to face his own madness rather than run away from it. Of course, as yet, Jack hasn't recognized his own madness, and thus cannot hear such pleas from within.

The Red Knight

Another aspect of the unconscious which Jack cannot yet see is the shadow; however, Parry's horrifying visions of the Red Knight provide a vivid image of the shadow archetype. In the traditional Grail legend, Perceval confronts and kills the Red Knight for having disgraced King Arthur's queen. Emma Jung and von Franz suggest that the Red Knight "can be taken as Perceval's personal shadow, as the sum of emotions and barbaric thoughtlessness which Perceval must overcome before he can become a Christian knight."6

For Parry, the Red Knight appears whenever something occurs to reactivate his memory of the painful past. Recoiling in fear, Parry remains unable to reconcile himself with the tragic loss of his wife. Although Jack cannot see the Red Knight, he is in fact haunted by the same demon which possesses Parry—the tragic killings at Babbits. Unable to work through his guilt, Jack also remains a victim, tortured by events from three years ago. The shadow image of the Red Knight is in pursuit of both characters, and Parry realizes he needs Jack's help to be victorious; Jack slowly begins to realize that he needs Parry as well. With this realization, Jack descends further into Parry's world, approaching a crucial threshold in the adventure.

Crossing the First Threshold

At this stage of the journey, the hero must make a choice whether or not to fully commit to the adventure. Campbell refers to this choice as "crossing the first threshold." Here the hero must demonstrate a willing commitment to engage himself or herself in the

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6Emma Jung and von Franz, p. 56.
journey. Up to this time, external factors may have pushed or pulled the character into some new set of circumstances or new environment. However, the hero is never simply a victim of fate; he or she must take up the challenge by an act of volition, demonstrating courage and commitment. The threshold choice facing Jack Lucas is whether or not he will willingly enter into Parry's seemingly insane world.

The Story

When Jack discovers the truth about the homeless madman's identity, he begins to hope that by helping Parry he might be appeased of his own guilt. Jack first tries to help by giving him money, but Parry has little interest in capital gains; aside from his duties as a knight, his only interest is a shy impish girl named Lydia. Parry has followed every move Lydia has made, and knows the most minute details of her daily routine; however, he has yet to muster up the courage to speak to her. Jack spends an entire day chasing after Parry as he swoons over Lydia, battles with visions of the Red Knight, and performs his knightly duties of helping people in distress.

Tests and Trials of the Hero

Jack's willingness to help Parry is a demonstration of his readiness to commit himself to the adventure. In mythological terms, it is his first step toward becoming a knight. Thus, in choosing to aid Parry, Jack passes through the first crucial threshold of the adventure. However, the hero must now undergo certain tests of his character to prove he is worthy for the adventure. Typically, the hero must exhibit courage and persistence throughout the course of these tests. Jack's test is to remain committed to helping Parry despite his frustrating psychotic episodes and embarrassing social behavior. With each scene that he manages to stay with Parry, Jack demonstrates his commitment to completing the journey.
In psychological terms, the tests and trials of the hero are symbolic of the turmoil we experience by encountering the contents of the unconscious. Approaching the hidden and repressed aspects of the psyche can be very difficult and sometimes dangerous, because we have already committed significant psychic energy toward their repression. In order to face our own shadow or anima/animus, we must be willing to dismantle the ego-identity to which we have attached ourselves. If such dismantling is not conducted with care, it can result in a complete psychotic breakdown. In coming face to face with the shadow of his past, Jack is taking such a risk. Although it provides the only path to his redemption, Jack's willful embracing of his past is also a path toward potential destruction.

The Trickster Archetype

A common archetype which appears during the trials and tests of the hero is the trickster. One of the most popular figures in folklore and fairy tales, the trickster archetype usually appears as a clown or comical sidekick. The trickster serves several important psychological functions:

They cut big egos down to size, and bring heroes and audiences down to earth. By provoking healthy laughter they help us realize our common bonds, and they point out folly and hypocrisy. Above all, they bring about healthy change and transformation, often by drawing attention to the imbalance or absurdity of a stagnant psychological situation. They are the natural enemies of the status quo.7

The character who most clearly exhibits the trickster function in The Fisher King is a homeless cabaret singer. In one of the film's most memorable scenes, the cabaret singer belts out his own rendition of tunes from the musical Gypsy in the middle of a publishing house. His wild performance provides a sharp contrast to the rigid working environment so familiar to many viewers in the audience. Here the trickster's primary challenge is to the persona: the mask we wear to present ourselves as working "professionals." The

trickster calls us to break out of our rigid conformity to social expectations, to loosen our ties, and allow ourselves to sing and dance.

The Supreme Ordeal

The supreme ordeal is not the climax of the story nor is it the accomplishment of the hero's goal; it is simply the ultimate test to prove the hero's worthiness to complete his adventure. Jack has made it through an entire day with Parry, and has thus proved himself worthy of the supreme ordeal. His reward will come in the form of a story, told to Jack by Parry, which will reveal the key to Jack's salvation. If he passes the supreme ordeal, he will then be considered worthy to approach the Grail castle itself.

The Story

At the end of the day, Parry tries to convince Jack to lie naked with him in Central Park and watch the clouds. Just as Jack begins to feel that his attempts to help Parry are hopeless, the errant knight tells Jack the story of the Fisher King. The Fisher King, who was the guardian of the holy Grail, was severely wounded and in constant agony. The wound of the Fisher King could only be healed by an act of pure compassion. One day, a Fool asks the simple question: What ails you? Discovering the King was thirsty, the Fool brought him some water. As a result of the Fool's compassion, the King's wounds were healed. After hearing the story of the Fisher King Jack regains his hope, believing that he can achieve his redemption by helping Parry get acquainted with Lydia. With the help of Anne and a flamboyant homeless cabaret singer, Jack succeeds in setting up a dinner date between Parry and Lydia. Lydia is almost as oddly eccentric as Parry and the two of them get along beautifully. Parry successfully woos his fair maiden. And Anne expresses her pride in Jack for having done a good deed. For the moment, all seems well with the two happy couples.
Keys to the Hero's Salvation

In telling the story of the Fool and the Fisher King, Parry has revealed the secret to his and Jack's redemption. The wounds suffered by both men can only be healed through a willful act of compassion. However, Jack doesn't quite get the message behind Parry's story. He fails to see that it is a "fool" who heals the King; he doesn't understand that his own salvation, and Parry's as well, can only come through his willingly accepting the madman's foolish request to seek the holy Grail. This point is crucial, because Jack must confront the images of his unconscious in order to be healed, and this can only occur through his willing descent into Parry's world of myth and madness. The archetypes of the collective unconscious can only be encountered within the depths of Jack's psyche, and, as yet, Jack is not ready or willing to descend that far.

Nevertheless, the story of the Fool and the Fisher King does inspire Jack to abandon his previous attempts at helping Parry, and pursue a goal that Parry himself is fervently interested in: the wooing of Lydia. This is an important step, because up to this point Jack has only tried to aid Parry in ways that Jack himself thinks would be helpful. In other words, Jack has relied on what his conscious ego has been telling him. By listening to what Parry really wants, Jack has symbolically begun to listen to the messages from his own unconscious, allowing the archetypes to direct him, rather than his own misdirected consciousness.

Thus, having heard and understood at least part of Parry's message, Jack believes that he will find his redemption through bringing Parry and Lydia together. Through his efforts to bring about this union, we see the beginnings of a more positive relation between Jack.

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*Here we should note that the medieval renditions of the Grail differ somewhat at this point. In Chretien de Troyes' Perceval, the worthy knight heals the Grail King's wound by asking the question, "Who is served from the Grail?" However, in Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival, the healing question is "What ails you?" Clearly, at this point, Gilliam's The Fisher King is following Wolfram's tradition.*
and his own anima. The expression of Jack's anima is illustrated through his impulse to care for or "nurture" Parry, an energy specifically related to positive images of the Mother archetype. Upon Jack's success in matchmaking Parry with Lydia, Anne (representing the anima image) tells Jack that she is proud of him as though she is a mother congratulating her child on a job well done.

With the completion of the supreme ordeal, Jack has passed his initiation into the "otherworld.” In psychological terms, he has successfully begun to encounter and assimilate the contents of the unconscious. Thus, after surviving the tests and trials of this initiation, the hero begins to reap the rewards of his or her efforts. Jack's reward is a re-awakening of his self-confidence. The emergence of self-confidence is the result of Jack's willingness to approach the archetypes of his unconscious. Having embraced Parry and his indigent friends, Jack has temporarily thrown away the mask of his inflated persona and approached the shadow of his past; having united Parry and Lydia, with the help of Anne, Jack has begun to embrace his neglected anima. However, up to this point, Jack has had very little to lose and everything to gain. Rather than taking the risk of fully entering into Parry's world of fantasy and myth, Jack has tried to drag Parry into the "real" world, teaching him how to properly behave in social contexts. Yet, to successfully achieve the adventure, Jack must now learn how to risk much more. Before he can truly be reborn, the hero must face the ultimate risk: death.
CHAPTER 8

STAGE III: THE HERO'S RETURN HOME

The Road Back

Having successfully achieved the supreme ordeal, the hero begins his or her departure from the special world of the adventure. This is the final stage of the monomythic journey; however, another threshold awaits the hero before he or she can successfully complete the journey and return home. This threshold represents the ultimate goal for the hero. In the Grail legend, it is the act of compassion performed by Perceval which heals the wounded Fisher King. In our story, Jack Lucas is not yet prepared to step through such a threshold, because it would mean fully embracing Parry's request that he seek the Grail, and Jack is not ready for such a foolish act. Hence, having successfully played the matchmaker of Parry and Lydia, Jack begins his return home, but he attempts to do so without having crossed the crucial final threshold.

The Story

Satisfied that he has atoned for his guilt, Jack begins to regain his self-confidence, and decides to once again pursue his career as a radio personality. He leaves Anne—the woman who has loved him and cared for him throughout his three years of emotional anguish, telling her he doesn't know whether or not he really loves her. Thus, Jack begins to resume the former life he had led. Immediately, his ratings soar to the top, he finds another beautiful young girlfriend to ignore, and once again, he is given the opportunity to star in his own sit-com. Yet, Jack's plans are once again altered when he discovers that Parry has fallen into a catatonic stupor. Just when Parry was beginning to feel good about Lydia's returning his affection, the Red Knight appears, reawakening the
memory of his late wife’s murder, and sending Parry into a harrowing psychotic hallucination. After being attacked at the river by the same two thugs who had doused Jack with gasoline, Parry had slipped into a coma.

Premature Return

Here Parry’s fortune and misfortune reveals an important point. Jack’s aid in getting Parry and Lydia together is a big step for the hero: he has demonstrated his ability to go to great lengths to help others. He has partially engaged the undifferentiated aspects of his anima and shadow; however, he has not gone far enough. Although Jack thinks he has learned his lesson, he has failed at the same point that Perceval did upon his first visit to the Grail Castle. Like Perceval, Jack has entered the castle, but has not performed the necessary healing act. Thus, Jack tries to depart from the otherworld prematurely.

Psychologically, Jack’s premature return reflects the re-emergence of his inflated persona. However, Parry’s coma suggests that something within Jack needs to be re-awakened. In essence, Jack has once again turned away from his anima (Anne) and his positive shadow energy (Parry). In so doing, the negative shadow energy (the Red Knight) has again expressed itself through the violent attack of the young thugs on Parry. Now, Jack must somehow find the appropriate way to resurrect the dying aspects of himself in order to fully achieve the victory. As yet, however, Jack does not realize that to be resurrected, one must first be crucified.

The Return Threshold: Death of the Hero

The road back home for the hero will always lead to the ultimate challenge: a willingness to die for the sake of the goal. Death is the final threshold through which the hero passes along the monomythic journey. Although the hero may be physically threatened, his or her death is essentially psychological. Here is where we see that the hero has truly changed as a result of his or her adventure into the otherworld. Jack Lucas'
death occurs when he finally realizes that he must give up his ego identity associated with
fame and fortune. For redemption, Jack must become a fool.

The Story

As hard as he tries, Jack cannot escape from his feelings for Parry. When he
discover that the sit-com in which he is supposed to star is about homeless people,
something inside of him breaks. He runs to the hospital, and tells his comatose friend
that he has finally decided to accept Parry’s original request—he will capture the holy
Grail. He makes clear that his motive for accepting this insane adventure is his
compassion for Parry. Thus, Jack dons the costume of a knight, which looks more like
the costume of a fool. Risking imprisonment at the least and death at the worst, Jack
climbs to the top of the billionaire’s mansion, breaks in, and steals the cup from the
trophy case. He returns the cup to his friend’s side, and Parry, with Grail in hand,
regains consciousness.

The Healing Question

In the medieval Grail legend, the Fisher King is healed when Perceval asks the healing
question, "what ails you?" The importance of this question lies in the fact that Perceval
had been taught it was improper for a knight to ask too many questions. Having followed
this advice on his first visit to the castle, Perceval, in his ego driven desire to be a proper
knight, failed to heal the King. However, after proving himself worthy of another attempt,
the hero enters the castle a second time, finally shuns the constraints of social
expectations, and asks the crucial question. Here, Perceval is no longer motivated by
society’s rules, but by the compassion of his own inner nature. The same challenge now
confronts Jack.

When Jack enters the hospital to see Parry, he is carrying the Pinocchio doll. At some
level, Jack realizes that he must embrace the mythological world symbolized by this doll in
order to save himself and his friend. As he approaches his final threshold, preparing to enter the mythological realm, Jack does not specifically state the same words as Perceval, but he does pose his own healing question to the comatose Parry: "what am I supposed to do?" His immediate answer to himself is "the Cup." Jack then makes clear his motive for taking on the quest. "If I do this, I want you to know it wouldn't be because I felt I had to, or because I felt cursed or guilty or responsible, or anything. If I do this, it's because I want to do this for you--for you." Thus, it becomes clear that, like Perceval, Jack has thrown off his persona, removed his mask of social conformity, and has embraced his natural impulse of compassion: an impulse that has been neglected until now. Out of compassion for Parry, Jack finally accepts the madman's offer to seek the holy Grail.

Death and Rebirth of the Hero

The death/rebirth motif is a central feature of heroic myths, and Jessie Weston was among the first scholars to recognize how this motif functions in the medieval Grail legend. In her book *From Ritual to Romance*, Miss Weston argues that ancient "mystery" or "fertility cults" provide a primary influence on the Grail legend. These religious groups were characterized by their ritual enactments of the cyclical processes of nature, symbolically representing death and rebirth through their rites. The rites themselves were intended to affect nature itself, insuring a fertile land, and a healthy crop. The Grail legend picks up on this theme through the image of the dying Fisher King who is brought back to life through the actions of the knight Perceval. With the rebirth of the King, the land, which had formerly been lying in waste, has its fertility restored.

This death/rebirth motif of the traditional Grail legend is expressed through Parry's condition: his coma representing death, his regaining conscious representing rebirth. Parry's death/rebirth experience metaphorically represents the death of Jack's ego and the

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birth of his integrated self. By completely entering into the mythological world of Parry, Jack has demonstrated his willingness to risk death for the sake of another. He is threatened with physical death as he hangs from a rope high atop the billionaire's mansion. More significantly, however, Jack has symbolically embraced the death of his own ego. No longer driven by the inflated persona's desire for power, wealth, and fame, he dons the garb of a medieval knight and becomes a fool. In so doing, Jack has fully entered into Parry's realm of myth and madness, and thus has willingly embraced his shadow. Through the positive energy of the shadow, Jack has found the creative solution to his problems. In so doing, Jack has truly found the Grail, not in the form of a stolen trophy, but in the form of an individuated psyche.

Here we see The Fisher King's prescription for the particular psychic conflicts suggested throughout the story: it is through Jack's foolish act of selflessness, an act of pure compassion, that both he and Parry are restored to life. On a literal level, the prescription certainly seems absurd: breaking into a rich man's house and stealing a trophy hardly seems an appropriate treatment for a catatonic stupor. Yet, on a metaphorical level, Jack's actions represent the extent of his empathy for Parry. Here we should recall Dr. John Weir Perry and Carl Jung's suggestions concerning the appropriate treatment of schizophrenia--allow the disturbed individual to work through their mythological fantasies as though they were themselves a character within the myth. This is precisely what Jack has done. By completing the mythic adventure, Jack has metaphorically worked out the madness with which Parry was possessed, thus healing his wound. At the same time, through his act of pure compassion, he has atoned for his own role in the tragic shooting at Babbits, thus healing himself.
The Healing Emotions

When Jack returns with the Grail and his friend is restored to consciousness, Parry makes a statement that is of vital psychological importance. Rising up with Grail in hand, Parry says, "I had this dream Jack. I was married to a beautiful woman. And you were there too. I really miss her Jack. Is that ok? Can I miss her now? Thank you." Up to this point, the painful past had appeared as a nightmare in the form of the Red Knight, but now it is only a dream. This transformation is the result of Parry's new found ability to "miss her," or in other words, to grieve the losses in his past. In this very subtle way, we see the implication that grief is the crucial healing emotion.

Clinical psychologists have recognized the vital importance of grief for patients dealing with traumas from their past. Grief is a natural response to the loss of something we consider important. When we experience such losses, and do not allow ourselves to grieve, emotional energy remains locked up inside, and we become prisoners to our unresolved past. As Jung states, "all our neuroses are substitutes for legitimate suffering." Parry's psychosis is related to his inability to grieve the loss of his wife, and to the guilt he feels for having survived the tragedy that resulted in her death. Jack's "emotional abyss" and his abuse of alcohol are symptoms of his inability to come to terms with his own guilt. However, Parry's statement, "Can I miss her now?" reveals a healthy acceptance of his traumatic past. With his friend's wounds now healed, Jack is also released from the chains of his past.

With Jack's decision to attain the Grail, we see that the hero has allowed the expression of important psychic functions which had formerly been repressed. Early in the story, Jack appeared to be motivated by the attitude of extraversion and the thinking
function of the psyche. His journey inward has revealed a willingness to embrace the introverted aspects of his nature. Moreover, his decision to seek the Grail is not motivated by thinking; he could not think of one good reason to act so foolishly. Rather, he is motivated by his feelings of compassion for Parry. With this reversal of psychic opposites (introversion for extroversion; feeling for thinking), Jack illustrates the Jungian principle of *enantiodromia*. Discussing this principle, Jung writes,

> I use the term enantiodromia for the emergence of the unconscious opposite in the course of time. This characteristic phenomenon practically always occurs when an extreme, one-sided tendency dominates conscious life; in time an equally powerful counterposition is built up, which first inhibits the conscious performance and subsequently breaks through the conscious control.\(^3\)

It is this reversal of opposites, the breaking through of introversion and feeling, that has allowed Jack to complete his journey. Having recognized the repressed aspects of his psyche, Jack has further individuated his personality and differentiated the unifying self archetype.

With the completion of the Grail quest, we can now see how Jack has changed from the beginning of the story. In Jack's former life, he treated other human beings such as Edwin like toys for his sardonic pleasure. After his fall, his interest in Parry was partly motivated by his own self-interest: to appease his guilt. Finally, however, when Jack has regained his wealth and fame, he reveals that Parry is more than an object to be used for his own selfish purposes: Parry has become his friend. And Jack, for the first time, reveals that he is capable of "feeling love," rather than merely "negotiating love moments." Jungian scholars Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette suggest that such transformations of character reflect a significant psychological change; Jack has moved beyond the ego-centered world of childhood into the world of adulthood, relating in a positive way to

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society, contributing to the good of others rather than focusing exclusively on himself. In mythological terms, the hero has died and been reborn. Now he can return to life with the boons of his adventure.

Returning with the Elixir

The significance of the hero's journey does not end with the completion of the goal; as a result of the adventure, the hero has been forever changed, and the lessons learned will have a lasting impact on his or her life. Thus, the hero can return to his ordinary life with the elixir he has attained from the journey. In psychological cases, the rewards of health are felt not only by the healed patient, but are also experienced by all those with whom the person has significant relations. For Jack, the elixir with which he returns from his journey will have important implications for his outward relationships with Anne and Parry as well as his inward relations to his anima and shadow.

The Story

Although Parry seems to have come to terms with the grief of his past, he retains the identity he has formed since the tragedy at Babbits. Reunited with Lydia, who has been by Parry's side throughout his catatonic state, Parry resumes his love affair with his fair maiden. Jack, having realized his newfound capacity for compassion, returns to Anne in order to speak the words he was unable to utter to her before his adventure—he tells Anne he loves her. The friendship formed between Jack and Parry seems to be forever crystalized as the two of them lie naked in Central Park, singing as they watch the clouds.
The Integrated Psyche

Upon his or her successful return, the hero has integrated the various archetypes of the unconscious into his or her own psyche. Jack has now incorporated the irrational energy of the trickster and he has gleaned wisdom from his mentors. He has been reunited with Anne, the symbol of his anima. Professing his love for her, he has symbolically entered into the "psychological marriage" with his psychic opposite. He has been released from the shadow of his guilt and incorporated the positive energy of the shadow into his personality. The symbol of Jack's embracing his positive shadow is in the final scene where we see him and Parry lying naked in the park, singing "How About You?" Jack has now embraced the positive side of his basic nature. The Pinocchio doll lies between the two men, symbolizing the role that mythology has played in bringing them together and leading them through their problems. Thus, Jack has come full circle, from adamantly denying the truth of fairy tales in the beginning of the story, to willingly embracing the life of a mythic hero in the end. Having encountered, overcome and/or assimilated the various archetypal forms into his own psyche, Jack Lucas has become a whole person, reflecting the development of the self and the individuation of the psyche.
CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSIONS

With the completion of the journey, one question remains: What can be learned from Jack Lucas' mythological adventure in *The Fisher King*? In the most general terms, *The Fisher King* once again teaches the essential lesson of all monomythic heroic tales. From this story, we see that the process of individuation represented by the hero's journey is a metaphorical death/rebirth experience. The old ego must die for the new identity of the hero to emerge. In this sense, all heroic adventures are ultimately a statement about how we deal with death and change. Heroes never complete their journey without facing the inevitable hardships of life: fear, grief, anger, etc. In the end, death must be accepted as an essential part of human existence. As Parry is finally able to grieve and overcome the death of his wife, and as Jack is able to let go of his guilt and his desires for power and wealth, both are released from the shadows that imprisoned them. Without denying that pain is part of life, the hero's journey as reflected in *The Fisher King* teaches us that life's trials and tests can be withstood and overcome.

More specifically, however, *The Fisher King* gives us a warning about the possible dangers of certain social values. Jung argues that psychic imbalance can be embodied in collective groups as well as individuals, and that preferences for one personality type over another might differ between cultures or historical periods. Hall and Nordby note:

Jung points out that fashions change with respect to what personality types are preferred. In one period of history, feeling may be favored; in another thinking may be the popular function. The anima may be repressed at one time and encouraged at another. Imbalances in personality often result from these changing fashions. Jung also says that different cultures may favor different personality types. In the Far East, for example, introversion
and intuition are favored, whereas in the West extraversion and thinking are valued.\[^5\]

The psychic conflict we have observed within Jack Lucas can be seen as representing conflicts within the social or cultural psyche of our own time. We see the potential hazards of over-identifying the ego with the persona. As I have already stated, Jack's inflated persona is a reflection of a tendency within our society to over-value the role of wealth and celebrity. The real danger in this over-identification comes through the backlash of the repressed shadow. Edwin's murderous rampage and assaults by the young thugs are not only cinematic representations of the violent potential of the shadow; they are reflections of the all too familiar headlines we read in the daily news. As Jung has suggested, we must find appropriate social outlets for the basic instinctual drives of humanity, or risk the violent expression of the shadow's negative energy.

_The Fisher King's_ prescription for addressing these potential societal problems is a reflection of the medieval Grail motif of the "wise fool." Like Perceval, Parry's romantic ideals seem foolish to society, as does Jack's ultimate willingness to engage in the Grail quest himself. They are deemed foolish because they contradict the dominant values of society which emphasize the persona, neglect the anima, repress the shadow, prefer extroversion to introversion, and emphasize thinking over feeling. Yet, society does not realize that these psychic imbalances are primary causes of individual and social problems. The fool who is willing to risk the adventure to the otherworld of the psyche is truly the wise one, because inner harmony and wholeness can only be achieved through the reconciliation of psychic opposites. As Anne aptly suggests, the whole purpose of life is for God and the Devil, the ultimate opposing forces, to get together and work it out.

Finally it should be emphasized that the monomythic journey of the hero and the process of individuation are ideals rather than realities. "The goal of complete

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differentiation, balance, and unity is rarely if ever reached, except, as Jung observes, by a Jesus or a Buddha.\textsuperscript{6} Thus, in following the hero’s path ourselves, we should not necessarily expect to glimpse the Beatific Vision or approach Nirvana. Still, we should be prepared for the herald’s call to adventure at any time in our life, because

striving for self-realization or consummate selfhood is archetypal, that is to say inborn. No one can avoid the powerful expression of this unity archetype, although what course its expression may take and how successful one may be in realizing the aim varies from person to person.\textsuperscript{7}

Thus, the journey of the hero is both an archetypal impulse within us and an ideal model for the attainment of self-realization. Seeing ourselves reflected in the hero myths, we view a glimpse of the greatest possibilities within our own lives.

Suggestions for Further Study

As I have shown through my analysis of \textit{The Fisher King}, the methods of mythography can be helpful tools in uncovering the universal truths expressed in narrative motion pictures. These methods can also help us discern the particular problems of local interest within our own society and culture. With its mixture of fantasy and reality and its self-conscious reliance upon the medieval Grail legend, \textit{The Fisher King} is an excellent example of how motion pictures can embody and express mythic themes and patterns.

As I have already suggested, certain film genres seem particularly well suited for the expression of mythic motifs (i.e. Horror, Fantasy, Science Fiction, and the Western), and a number of studies have been done by mythographical critics on films in these genres. However, very few studies have addressed the "Sports" film as a genre. Sports, both professional and amateur, play an extremely important role in American society, and many of the cultural and personal issues surrounding sports have been addressed in motion pictures. A particularly interesting subject for research would be a study of the

\textsuperscript{6}Hall and Nordby, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{7}Hall and Nordby, p. 82.
mythological elements of American baseball films. A wide range of ethnic and universal issues are raised in such movies as *The Natural*, *Field of Dreams*, *A League of Their Own*, and *Bull Durham*. Although baseball provides the context for these stories, each of these films represents a "rite of passage" narrative through which the hero's own psychic issues are worked out or played out on and around the baseball field. Such a study might help explain the psychic issues behind America's fascination with sports, and also address the ways in which a certain individual's psychic conflict might be projected onto the field of play.

Whether the setting is a baseball diamond, New York City, or a galaxy far, far away, the significance of a mythological film narrative is its ability to touch the inner reaches of the human spirit, calling forth the hero within us to embark upon our own monomythic journey. The recognition of mythic motifs in film, and how such motifs relate to individuals and society is the purpose of the methodology I have proposed in this essay. With the continuing emergence of various forms of mythographical criticism among cinema studies scholars, I can only hope that this method of analysis will eventually gain the recognition it deserves.
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Books


**Articles**


