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## **Two Myths Walk Into a Bar**

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*Monomyth* is the term coined by James Joyce and used by Joseph Campbell to describe a mythic structure Campbell believed to be universal, collectively and individually. His book, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, published in 1949, is an exegesis of that mythic structure.

And whether it was *Finnegan's Wake* or the Navaho material, or the Hindu material,... it was all the same material. That was when I realized--and nobody can tell me any differently--that there's one mythology in the world. It has been inflected in various cultures in terms of their historical and social circumstances and needs and particular local ethic systems, but it's *one mythology*. (Campbell, 1990, p. 127)

Campbell's argument is compelling.

The whole sense of the ubiquitous myth of the hero's passage is that it shall serve as a general pattern for men and women, wherever they may stand along the scale. Therefore it is formulated in the broadest terms. The individual has only to discover his own position with reference to this general human formula, and let it then assist him past his restricting walls.

(Campbell, 1973, p. 121)

He considers this the *only* path to transformation, or individuation. It is a process of "validating and maintaining some specific social order, authorizing its moral code as a construct beyond criticism or human emendation" (Campbell, 1988, p. 140) and allowing "reconciliation of consciousness with the preconditions of its [a person's] own existence" (p. 138).

Campbell adequately supports the idea that this mythic structure is found in many (but not all) cultures, but there is no evidence for his conclusion that the heroic journey constitutes the only mythic path. To assert that any construct exists which is "beyond criticism and human emendation" ignores a self-evident condition of existence. *Everything* changes. If consciousness evolves, individually and collectively, then it might

be suggested that others possibilities may present themselves for the evolution of humankind.

The monomyth describes that phase of life after childhood but prior to adulthood. It begins with a separation from the protection and control of cultural (or parental) authority. Like most stories and all lives, the monomyth has a beginning, middle, and end, which Campbell calls the separation, the trials, and the return. The hero is thrust into a confounding world of contradictions, surreal experiences, and dangerous interactions. His task is to sort things out, delineating bad from good. In doing so, he establishes order and becomes worthy to ascend to a position of maturity/authority.

The "Call To Adventure" is the "first stage of the mythological journey [which] signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown" (Campbell, 1973, p. 58). There comes a time when a young person feels the longing to leave the nest. There is discomfort in too much comfort. Home and hometown have become too small--or so it seems. The backyard has lost its charm. The world, which used to feel big and intimidating, has shrunk. The young adult longs to explore what's lies beyond. Sometimes "The Call" is a nudge--a college acceptance letter or an exotic journey.

Sometimes it is a shove—a draft notice, graduation, or job. A very young president once called upon a very young nation, “Before this decade is out, to land a man on the Moon and return him safely to the earth” (Kennedy, 1961). Whatever the form, “The Call” is met with a mixture of anticipation and hesitation, longing and rejection, dread and awe. Fear of change rises up in the fledgling hero, resulting in the next step, “Refusal Of The Call.” Setting out for the unknown seemed fine hypothetically, but actually getting on the plane starts to seem foolish. Rationalizations proliferate. The grass might not be greener somewhere else. Some go to extremes to avoid the risks. High School girls get pregnant. Spring of Senior year is prime time for drunken binges and automobile crashes. But “The Call” will not go away. When it remains unanswered, the subject begins to feel “walled in,” experiencing a loss of “power of significant affirmative action,” and feeling that he is living in a wasteland (Campbell, 1973. p. 59). Eventually circumstances conspire to move the reluctant traveler along. This is a fork in the road, requiring courage. It is a choice between growth or stagnation. Many refuse and never reconsider, but the hero steps out in faith and is rewarded by “Supernatural Aid.”

“[T]he first encounter of the journey is with a protective figure..., who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass” (p. 69). Supernatural assistants vary in form. They have a distinct

sense of "otherness," encouraging behaviors outside everyday experience. "With the personifications of his destiny to guide and aid him, the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the 'threshold guardian' at the entrance to the zone of magnified power" (p. 77). Clutching an amulet, exhilarated by the thrill of the unknown, undaunted by a pounding heart, the hero crosses the threshold to step outside protective walls. Here he will confront demons, dance with angels, die to illusions, and, in the end, stand naked, part genius/part idiot. The teenage vamp, intoxicated by her Aphroditic powers, ignores the dangers of hooking up. The young man with testosterone coursing through his veins, believes himself to be immortal. Awash in inflation, poised on the brink, they take the leap. The daredevil lands in total darkness, directly in the "Belly of the Whale." His newfound confidence evaporates. Bravado is replaced with terror. "The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown and would appear to have died" (p. 90). Not what he expected. That magical amulet--the scholarship, motorcycle, credit card, breasts, or biceps—is of little use here.

Thus begins the midsection, "Trials and Victories of Initiation." No sooner does he extricate himself than he washes up on a foreign shore. Along

the "Road of Trials," he encounters what he perceives as the "evil other," but is actually the shadow aspects of himself. "

The hero...discovers and assimilates his opposite...either by swallowing it or by being swallowed. One by one the resistances are broken. He must put aside his pride, his virtue, beauty, and life, and bow or submit to the absolutely intolerable. Then he finds that he and his opposite are not of differing species, but one flesh. (p. 108)

Challengers appear to confront him. "*Who are you* to think that you can assume a place in the world alongside the titans of your childhood? Have you forgotten your recent humiliating past?" Perhaps these voices argue for the the insignificance of the hero, and the injustice of life's demands. "You are a victim," they say. "Why should you have to do anything *this* difficult? If you fail, it isn't your fault. It is your mother's/father's fault. Clearly, it is the fault of the school system, the brother who hit you, the lover who abandoned you, the society that failed to protect you. You should never be expected to assume responsibility for the world you live in.

Doubts undermine his determination. The victim role is seductive. Like all of us, he must make a choice. He eludes one demon and another rears its head. The essential question is universal. Are we responsible for ourselves or shall we lose our way by wallowing in our defenses?

Thus far, this is pretty much a trip we all take. However, at this juncture problems arise for the heroic female. Following the monomyth, a female finds herself in a long corridor with only one door, marked "Men's Room." She is offered the role of Queen Goddess, but it is a choice she will regret.

The male hero's "Meeting with the Goddess" is described as the "bliss of infancy regained" (p. 109).

The ultimate adventure, when all the barriers and ogres have been overcome, is commonly represented as a mystical marriage . . . of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen Goddess of the World" (p. 109).

Here is the story jumps from path of individuation to male fantasy.

Campbell asks me to believe that after all he has been through, what the young hero wants most is his mommy, (or a sexually available equivalent). The ogres slain, he goes looking for a "girl, just like the girl that married dear old Dad." "The bliss that once was known will be known again: the comforting, the nourishing, the 'good' mother--young and beautiful--who was known to us and even tasted, in the remotest past. (p. 111).

Our hero, longing for the bosomy comforts of infancy, is lured into the arms of what he believes to be a goddess. Once he has discovered the "bliss of infancy regained," he comes to the horrifying realization that this "Woman is

a Temptress." Divinity will never be found in the arms of a woman. Women are temptations of the flesh, evil pitfalls luring our hero away from his true destiny.

The crux of the difficulty lies in the fact that our conscious views of what life ought to be seldom correspond to what life really is.

Generally we refuse to admit within ourselves, or within our friends, the fullness of that pushing, self-protective, malodorous, carnivorous, lecherous fever which is the very nature of the organic cell. Rather, we tend to perfume, whitewash, and reinterpret; meanwhile imaging that all the flies in the ointment, all the hairs in the soup, are the faults of some unpleasant someone else. (pp. 121-22)

In this case, women. Campbell declines to desist in this misogyny. The price that is paid is that every "mother, sister, mistress, bride" is tainted by her mortality, at least in this story.

But when it suddenly dawns on us, or is forced to our attention, that everything we think or do is necessarily tainted with the odor of the flesh, then not uncommonly, there is experienced a moment of revulsion: life, the acts of life, the organs of life, woman in particular as the great symbol of life, become intolerable to the pure, the pure, pure soul. (p. 122)

This poor, pure, *puer* soul, by renouncing the feminine and embracing the masculine, is ready for "Atonement with the Father." It goes something like this, "Forgive me father for clinging to the bloody whore who gave me birth. I renounce her and swear allegiance to the patriarchy in perpetuity! I appeal to you, Great Father--omniscient, omnipotent, eternal—for admission to the ranks of the exalted." The hazing phase is not considered the work of a Bad Father, but a Good Father. This is Boot Camp for Heroes. "For the ogre aspect of the father is a reflex of the victim's own ego--derived from the sensational nursery scene that has been left behind. . ." (p. 129).

The female half of the human race has a repugnant role in this tragedy. The "good" man has come to the realization that he is master of the universe and it is his task to rule over all, including, unfortunately but inevitably, "bad" women.

When the child outgrows the popular edge of the mother's breast and turns to face the world of specialized adult action, it [sic] passes spiritually into the sphere of the father--who becomes, for his son, the sign of the future task, and for his daughter, of the future husband.

Whether he knows it or not, and no matter what his position in society, the father is the initiating priest through whom the young being passes on into the larger world. And just as, formerly, the

mother represented the "good" and "evil," so now does he, but with this complication--that there is a new element of rivalry in the picture: the son against the father for the mastery of the universe, and the daughter against the mother to *be* the mastered world. (p. 136)

The hero makes the remarkable discovery that he and the Father are one! He has created himself in the image of his God-image. As it says in the book of John, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him" (John 14: 6-7, Bible & Various, 1996). This miraculous process of "Apotheosis" has transformed a sniveling suckling to a misogynistic deity. Hierarchy has been established with the hero at the top of the human heap, co-existent with God the Father. For Campbell this is the resolution of opposites. It is intolerable that the source of life should be feminine. He must renounce his mother, align himself with the father, and repress all knowledge of how babies are made. This is a betrayal of the life force.

Campbell finishes with a flourish. "The good news, which the World Redeemer brings and which so many have been glad to hear, zealous to preach, but reluctant, apparently, to demonstrate is that God is love, that He can be, and is to be loved, and that all, without exception are his children"

(Campbell, 1973, p. 158). The “good news” turns out to be a rationalization of narcissistic inflation.

Heady as this ascension to the throne, "The Ultimate Boon" requires additional sacrifice. The hero must return to the world from which he came and spread the Word.

When the hero quest has been accomplished..., the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy...[to] begin the labor of bringing the runes of wisdom... back into the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds. (p. 193)

Should he decline, he is whisked home, in a "Magic Flight," or a "A Rescue from Without." Either way, the hero finds himself "Crossing the Return Threshold."

This brings us to the final crisis of the round, to which the whole miraculous excursion has been but a prelude--that, namely of the paradoxical, supremely difficult threshold-crossing of the hero's return from the mystic realm into the land of common day..... He has yet to confront society with his ego-shattering, life-redeeming elixir and take the return blow of reasonable queries, hard resentment, and good people at a loss to comprehend. (p. 216)

The hero has become the "Master of the 2 Worlds," who is

...blessed with a vision transcending the scope of normal human destiny, and amounting to a glimpse of the essential nature of the cosmos. Not his personal fate, but the fate of mankind, of life as a whole, the atom and all the solar systems, has been opened to him; and this in terms befitting his human understanding, that is to say, in terms of an anthropomorphic vision: the Cosmic Man. (p. 234)

Cosmic Man has earned the "Freedom to Live."

Man in the world of action loses his centering in the principle of eternity if he is anxious for the outcome of his deeds, but resting them and their fruits on the knees of the Living God he is released by them, as by a sacrifice, from the bondages of the sea of death. (p. 239)

When I first read Campbell's *Hero*, I had an initial admiration for it. In the context of a Sixties zeitgeist, the possibility of a universal sacred mythology seemed to offer a path to peace.

I was wrong.

The monomyth incites violence, promotes war, establishes an inauthentic and arbitrary hierarchy, perpetuates class systems and entitlement, supports racism and patriarchy. It objectifies the Other, reassuring us that those we harm with our greed and our prejudices are not

“real.” Cruelty, exploitation, and self-indulgence are glorified. Power over the Other is glorified, to our detriment. The monomyth has not led us to peace, nationally or globally. Here we are, in 2016, armed to the teeth. We have, as James Hillman puts it, “a terrible love of war.” The monomyth of monotheism has been misused to justify the most grievous of behaviors. This mythology requires scrutinizing, deconstructing, and renovating. Many who study Depth Psychology and the role of mythology have entered the labyrinth in search of a different interpretation. Some call this reinterpretation a “polyfunctional” mythology. (David Miller calls it the New Polytheism.) I call it simply, the *polymyth*.

Some contend that a mythic shift takes time, particularly collectively. I would argue that it is a matter of choice, whether individually or collectively. Once we “see through” (Hillman’s phrase) a mythology, we have a choice about it. We assume responsibility for living in that mythic container. We cannot pretend we do not know.

Like the *monomyth*, the *polymyth* begins with separation and departure. But the polymythic traveler is not tapped by a Divine Emissary. Rather, “S\_\_t happens!”

Our heroine meets with catastrophe. Chaos ensues. A tornado picks up Dorothy’s house, whirls it around, plummeting her toward her fate. She is ,

hoping to survive. Refusal is not an option. To her horror, the house lands on the Wicked Witch of the East, killing her. Dorothy is horrified.

In some cases, the heroine receives Supernatural Aid, but just as often it is Natural Aid (an ordinary person). While Glinda the Good Witch appears to Dorothy, magic wand in hand, she does nothing more for her than point her in the direction of the Wizard of Oz and suggest she put on the red shoes. In other stories, like *Fried Green Tomatoes*, aid comes from down-to-earth, practical godmothers, like Ninny Threadgoode. Supernatural or natural, the message is the same every time. "Get a grip, girl. It's time to grow up. You have everything you need to cope with whatever life hands you." Amulets are optional. The heroine is dropped, kicked, shoved, or catapulted on her way. Swirling over the threshold, she drops into an unknown world. Dorothy is surrounded by a strange tribe of tiny people, who prevail upon her to become their ruler. No throne for her; she just wants to go home.

She sets out for the City of Emeralds, in the belief that the Wizard offers her only hope for rescue. (Many women believe they need a to be rescued. This is akin to the hero's refusal.) Dorothy's Road of Trials takes her along the yellow brick road, where she encounters the proverbial Others--the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion. Each tells her that he desperately lacks something vital--brain, heart, or courage--and is, therefore,

unable to manage his own life. Dorothy invites each to join her in her search for a savior. They encounter many dangers. Each companion is called upon to use the very thing they insist they lack. They never fail to do so. The polymyth is not populated by stereotypical figures wearing white hats and black hats, but rather multidimensional creatures with surprising aspects. Some are evil, but often our heroine discovers that the very one she thought was an enemy is not at all. Even the flying monkeys become her allies. Monomythic enemies require slaughter, blasting, mass destruction. The wars to end wars never end up being the last war, because the myth is self-perpetuating. Dorothy's weapons are a flying house over which she has no control, a thump on the lion's nose, a bucket of water, and a stern reprimand.

Regarding gender, Campbell's world is strictly dualistic. Male and female, men and women. Heroes are men and women are trials and tribulations. The hero encounters the feminine with lust, followed by revulsion. She is a temptress, a honey pot designed to lure him from his divine mission. This angers him. Infancy can never *be* regained. The hero projects all this fury on to the mother/feminine and labels her *bitch*. We might call this the *Lear complex*. "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child" (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 312).

Along the heroic journey, there are good women and bad women.

There are good men and there are *enemies*. Everything is divided neatly into two categories. The Father may, at times appear to be an ogre, but he is training his successor for leadership through tough love. Bad men are NEVER made of the RIGHT STUFF. Our hero has no compunctions about blowing them to *kingdom come*.

This is a prime example of dualistic thinking, which is simplistic thinking, and inaccurate almost all the time. It is like telling the time by its proximity to midnight or noon.

The polymythic view of gender is amorphous. Characters are frequently androgynous. Female characters, like all human beings, behave badly, kindly, fearfully, courageously, and in between. There is no bosom/bitch dichotomy. Women are people, not possessions. Males are mortals, not gods. Sexuality exists on a spectrum. Every human, having had both a mother and a father, and is a mixture of them both.

The issue of gender bias has generated the harshest criticism of the monomyth. It creates intolerable expectations and horrendous projections. What child is this, having reached maturity, is just discovering the "odor of the flesh?" His mother noticed it the first time she changed his diapers, or wiped spit-up off her shoulder. Where is his awareness when he is bathing, defecating, vomiting, breathing? Does this pure deluded soul imagine that he

is made of finer stuff than mortal flesh and that the woman who bore him has unjustly inflicted mortality upon him? He not only imagines such, but insists that he is correct in these puerile assertions. He clings to his illusions, carrying his "revulsion" for the rest of his life, alienated from his own body and every *body* else. It is inconceivable to me that Campbell imagines that "the hero's passage . . . shall serve as a general pattern for men and women" (Campbell, 1973, p. 121). As a woman, as a human, this is an unappealing path, lacking a grasp of reality. The monomyth mutilates the psyche of every human who embraces it—"without exception."

It is a mark of immaturity to be unable to contemplate complexity. Only a child would have a tantrum, demanding restoration of opposites. The innocent are undiscerning for they are *ignorant*. To paraphrase Emerson, "Dualism is the hobgoblin of little minds."

The hero clings to his proclivities for a simple world, where right and wrong are easily discernible, and he rejects his past, redolent as it is of bodily fluids. Mother is associated with childhood and infancy, with insignificance and with flesh. Mother is feminine, which equals evil. No woman will ever love enough to redeem herself in the eyes of this hero--not wife, lover, daughter, or granddaughter. This is the Father archetype that the hero is expected to become, the throne to which he ascends. He is expected to

become infallible and have dominion over. This is not a path I would advocate for any human being. It is self-mutilation.

Campbell's "good news" is that the mother has been demonized, labeled a slut and stripped of her children. Daughters are vilified, labeled "whores," and ostracized. Daddies and sons are deified, set atop a pyramid, cut off from authenticity. Can Campbell possibly imagine that this journey is the path of individuation for all of humanity? Does the path of truth consist of vilifying the Other and establishing one's self as a supreme being? Far from being "good news," this is very sad news indeed.

Like the Monomyth, the Polymyth ends with the Return and Reintegration. In the monomyth, the hero returns with the good news that he has become a god, the Apotheosis. Having cured himself of his humanity, he is prepared to save each of us from the discomfort of having to grow up. He will do the work for us. This is what Campbell calls *grace*. "[T]he possibility of physical immortality charms the heart of man" (Campbell, 1973, p. 188). The heroine's epiphany is that Divine Power resides within all. The Scarecrow has always been able to think. The Tin Man has always had a loving heart. The Lion has far more courage than he imagined. Dorothy has had the power all along, the power to love, to overcome difficulties, to protect herself, and to find her way home. The Ultimate Boon is the

acceptance of the human condition. The light within us all fades to black. We have more power than we think, but death is inevitable.

The finale, I call Unmasking the Humbug.

Presently they heard a Voice seeming to come from somewhere near the top of the great dome, and it said solemnly, "I am OZ, the Great and Terrible. Why do you seek me?"

They looked again in every part of the room, and then, seeing no one, Dorothy asked, "Where are you?"

"I am everywhere," answered the Voice, "but to the eyes of common mortals I am invisible. I will now seat myself upon my throne, that you may converse with me." (Baum & Zwerger, 2011, p.130)

Dorothy and her companions, having fulfilled their part of the covenant, approach the throne to demand that they receive their promised rewards-- heart, brain, courage, and passage home. The Wizard puts them off.

"The Lion thought it might be as well to frighten the Wizard, so he gave a large, loud roar, which was so fierce and dreadful that Toto jumped away from him in alarm and tipped over the screen that stood in a corner. As it fell with a crash they looked that way, and the next moment all them were filled with wonder. For they saw, standing in just the spot the screen had hidden, a little old man with a bald head

and a wrinkled face, who seemed to be as surprised as they were. (p. 135)

For one moment, Dorothy's judgment is clouded by her outrage. (She forgets that life is not fair and all are fallible.)

"I think you are a very bad man, " said Dorothy.

"Oh no, my dear. I'm really a very good man, but I'm a very bad Wizard, I must admit." (p.136)

And so it is with any of us who assume we have transcended the human condition and become one with the Immortals. Humans make very bad Wizards/Gods.

The polymythic adventurer discovers s/he is Master of None, having Dominion over Nothing, frequently mistaken. We are divine, but not immortal. No one rules by Divine Right. Massacres are not holy. Rape and plunder are not heroic. Our heroine's big discovery is that wherever you go, you are home. The "boon" is that view from outer space of the big blue marble view. Earth is our home. When it comes to our planet, we need to understand. Either we share or we die together.

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Druscilla French, Ph.D. is a philanthropist, mythologist, feminist, novelist, and lecturer. Her first novel, *Shadows on Samhain* languishes on Amazon, while her second, *Solstice on Ice*, languishes in her computer awaiting much needed revisions and an intrepid publisher. She is currently writing a book on Depth Psychology entitled *Two Myths Walk Into a Bar* in which she examines the post-modern evolution and deconstruction of the revered monomyth. This article is excerpted from that work in progress.