

The Use of Joseph Campbell's "The Hero's Journey" in *Harry Potter*

Joseph Campbell is a mythologist who studied all of the great human myths and religious tales. He realized, in studying these myths and tales, that there were certain steps that every hero went through. He called this "The Hero's Journey." He first divided "The Hero's Journey" into three main parts: Departure (part I), Initiation (part II) and Return (part III) (Campbell ix).

Campbell then subdivided these three parts into a total of seventeen total steps. In the Departure, there are five steps: 1) The Call to Adventure, 2) The Refusal of the Call, 3) Supernatural Aid, 4) The Crossing of the First Threshold, and 5) The Belly of the Whale. In the Initiation, there are six steps: 1) The Road of Trials, 2) The Meeting with the Goddess, 3) Woman as the Temptress, 4) Atonement with the Father, 5) Apotheosis, and 6) The Ultimate Boon. In the Return, there are another six steps: 1) Refusal of the Return, 2) The Magic Flight (Campbell ix), 3) Rescue from Without, 4) The Crossing of the Return Threshold, 5) The Master of Two Worlds, and 6) Freedom to Live (Campbell x). It is important to note that not all of these individual steps are present in every hero's tale, nor is it important that they be in this exact order (Vogler).

After Campbell studied a lot of the great myths and realized this pattern, he published his findings in his book *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, first published in 1949. Ever since then, authors have used "The Hero's Journey" as an outline to tell their stories. One of the best-known examples of "The Hero's Journey" from contemporary popular culture is the *Harry Potter* book series, written by J.K. Rowling.

The Departure starts off with the Call to Adventure. As Campbell puts it, "[a] blunder—apparently the merest chance—reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual [the hero] is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood" (51). This blunder causes

ripples, and the largest ripple is called the herald—the being that calls the hero to adventure (Campbell 51). “But whether small or great, and no matter what the stage or grade of life, the call rings up the curtain, always, on a mystery of transfiguration—a rite, or moment, of spiritual passage, which, when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth. The familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand” (Campbell 51).

Next comes the hero’s Refusal of the Call. Sometimes, the hero’s culture teaches that adventuring beyond the known world is wrong (Campbell 59). “Some of the victims [those that refuse their call] remain spellbound forever (at least, so far as we are told), but others are destined to be saved [and eventually accept the call]” (Campbell 63). The fact that the hero may originally refuse the call does not mean that there will not be an adventure and that the hero won’t go on his or her quest. As Campbell writes, “Not all who hesitate are lost” (Campbell 64).

The Call to Adventure in the *Harry Potter* series is quite easy to point out. It occurs near the beginning of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*. The herald, Rubeus Hagrid, tells Harry that he’s a wizard and explains Harry’s past (Rowling *Sorcerer’s* 50). The Refusal of the Call is also quite obvious: “Hagrid looked at Harry with warmth and respect blazing in his eyes, but Harry, instead of feeling pleased and proud, felt quite sure there had been a horrible mistake. A wizard? Him?” (Rowling *Sorcerer’s* 57).

Along the hero’s journey, the hero is given a Supernatural Aid. Campbell puts it best: “[The] first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure (often a little old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass” (69). This could take the form of an old wizard or just someone to be a friend to the hero who helps them through his or her quest.

In Harry's case, he has two Supernatural Aids: Hagrid and Albus Dumbledore, the headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, who becomes something of a father figure to Harry. Hagrid took Harry to get his wand, which is the major weapon that Harry uses in his fight against Voldemort, the supreme evil (Rowling *Sorcerer's* 85). Dumbledore, on the other hand, mentors Harry through his fight against Voldemort. In addition, Dumbledore gives Harry the Cloak of Invisibility (Rowling *Sorcerer's* 202), which later comes up in Harry's Initiation as a part of the Ultimate Boon. We also find out that Harry and Voldemort's wand have the same wand core: a phoenix feather from Dumbledore's phoenix, Fawkes (Rowling *Goblet* 697).

The next step in the hero's journey is the Crossing of the First Threshold. The hero starts to adventure, but eventually gets to the edge of the known land and must travel out into the unknown. First, however, the hero must get past the threshold guardian into the land of the unknown, the land of power (Campbell 77). This threshold is usually the first real danger that the hero comes across.

The Crossing of the First Threshold occurs at the end of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. At the end of the first book, Harry encounters Voldemort for the second time, but it's really the first time that any battle with Voldemort is explained in detail. Granted, up to this point, he has left the familiar life of Number Four, Privet Drive behind, but he's still going to school, which he's always done. This is the first time that Harry really gets to fight the supreme evil (Rowling *Sorcerer's* 294).

After Crossing the First Threshold, the hero is thrown into 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" (Campbell 90). During this time where the hero is thought to be dead, the hero is actually waiting to be reborn, in a sense. After the hero's first

encounter with the forces of evil, he or she is now wiser, and knows more what to expect. The Departure encases the hero's leaving of the familiar and the hero's first encounter with the forces of evil.

Harry's Departure completes in the Belly of the Whale directly after his first battle with Voldemort, when he wakes up in the Hospital Wing. In the Belly of the Whale, the hero is often thought to have died. Dumbledore admits that he thought he may have been too late in arriving to save Harry from Voldemort (Rowling *Sorcerer's* 297). In addition to this, we learn that Harry has not completely defeated the ultimate evil (Rowling *Sorcerer's* 298).

After the hero's Departure comes the Initiation. This process starts with the Road of Trials. This is mostly a series of troubles that the hero comes across that he or she deals with in the ultimate journey to defeat the forces of evil (Campbell 97). The next few books tell of Harry's Road of Trials. In book two, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Harry kills a giant snake that has been terrorizing the school (320) and defeats a younger version of Voldemort that attempted to come back to life through the use of his old diary (322). In the next book, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Voldemort's faithful servant Peter Pettigrew, previously thought to be Harry's friend Ron's pet rat Scabbers, escapes (381). In addition to this, Harry defeats a large amount of Dementors, soul-sucking creatures who defend the wizard prison Azkaban (Rowling *Prisoner* 411), and saves his godfather, Sirius, who was wrongly accused of killing thirteen people (Rowling *Prisoner* 415).

The Road of Trials continues in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, where Harry is thrown into the Triwizard Tournament, an ancient competition between three of Europe's best magic schools, where he must complete three tasks. In the first task, Harry must obtain a golden dragon egg from a nesting mother (Rowling *Goblet* 356). In the second task, Harry has to save

his friend Ron from the merpeople in the school lake (Rowling *Goblet* 505). The final task involves traversing a maze and getting to the Triwizard Cup at the center in order to win the tournament. Harry reaches the cup at the same time as another competitor from the same school, and so they both touch it and are whisked away from the maze.

In a lot of the myths, the father-figure is seen as over-bearing and nightmarish. Campbell writes, “[The] archetypal nightmare of the ogre father is made actual in the ordeals of primitive initiation” (137). Therefore, this meeting with the father-figure is often another fight of the forces of good and evil.

In Harry’s case, the Atonement with the Father occurs when Voldemort is resurrected, with Pettigrew brewing a potion that grew Voldemort a body. Rowling writes:

The thin man stepped out of the cauldron, staring at Harry...and Harry stared back into the face that had haunted his nightmares for three years. Whiter than a skull, with wide, livid scarlet eyes and a nose that was flat as a snake’s with slits for nostrils....

Lord Voldemort had risen again. (Rowling *Goblet* 643)

After Voldemort is risen, Harry and Voldemort duel (Rowling *Goblet* 663). After Harry and Voldemort fight, Harry just barely escapes back to the maze (Rowling *Goblet* 669).

Next in Harry’s journey comes his Apotheosis. In this step, the hero learns what he or she must do to complete the adventure. With this knowledge, the hero doesn’t get the power to live forever, but the hero knows what he has to do in order to be able to live forever (Campbell 167).

Harry’s Apotheosis happens in two parts. First, he learns of the prophecy concerning him and Voldemort:

The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches.... Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies...and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord known not...and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives.... The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies. (Rowling *Order* 841)

In the next book, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Harry learns that Voldemort has encased parts of his soul in objects and has spread them all over the country, and that, in order to defeat Voldemort once and for all, all of these objects, called Horcruxes, must be destroyed.

After Harry's Apotheosis comes his Meeting with the Goddess. "The mythological figure of the Universal Mother imputes [represents] to the cosmos the feminine attributes of the first, nourishing, and protecting presence" (Campbell 113). This means that the hero often meets a woman that he falls in love with that will supposedly help him in his journey. In Harry's case, the Goddess is Ron's younger sister Ginny. In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Harry realizes that he has feelings for Ginny (289). Eventually, Harry and Ginny do start dating (Rowling *Half* 535).

The next step is called the Woman as the Temptress. This involves the goddess becoming something impure that wants to stop the hero in his quest (Campbell 123). She may be evil, and just want chaos to reign on the land. More likely, though, she will be a concerned sister or spouse that is really concerned with the hero not dying or being harmed in any way, shape or form. The latter is Harry's experience with Ginny. At Dumbledore's funeral in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Harry breaks up with Ginny so that Voldemort won't go after her. Ginny, however, wants them to stay together. Rowling writes:

[Harry said,] “Voldemort uses people his enemies are close to. He’s already used you as bait once, and that was just because you’re my best friend’s sister. Think how much danger you’ll be in if we keep this up. He’ll know, he’ll find out. He’ll try and get to me through you.”

“What if I don’t care?” said Ginny fiercely.

“I care,” said Harry. “How do you think I’d feel if this was your funeral...and it was my fault....”

She looked away from him, over the lake.

“I never really gave up on you,” she said. “Not really. I always hoped...Hermione told me to get on with life, maybe go out with some other people, relax a bit around you, because I never used to be able to talk if you were in the room, remember? And she thought you might take a bit more notice if I was a bit more—myself.”

“Smart girl, that Hermione,” said Harry, trying to smile. “I just wish I’d asked you sooner. We could’ve had ages...months...years maybe....”

“But you’ve been too busy saving the Wizarding world,” said Ginny, half laughing. “Well...I can’t say I’m surprised. I knew this would happen in the end. I knew you wouldn’t be happy unless you were hunting Voldemort. Maybe that’s why I like you so much.” (Rowling *Half* 646-7)

So while Harry doesn’t fall for Ginny’s want to stay together despite the troubles, there is hope for them for the future.

After learning what must be done to live forever, the hero starts to work towards it.

Usually, this means acquiring some object. This object that lets the hero live forever is called

the Ultimate Boon (Campbell 176). “[The] boon is simply a symbol of life energy stepped down to the requirements of a certain specific case” (Campbell 189).

In *Harry Potter*, the Ultimate Boon is actually in three parts—the Ultimate Boon is made up of the three Deathly Hallows. The Hallows are three items that, if owned by a single person, will make the owner conqueror of Death (Rowling *Deathly* 410). They are the Elder Wand, an unbeatable wand, the Resurrection Stone, a stone that will bring shadows of loved ones back from the nether, and the Cloak of Invisibility, which will render the wearer completely invisible (Rowling *Deathly* 409).

Harry’s acquiring of the Hallows is a stretched-out process. He receives the Invisibility Cloak from Dumbledore in his first year at Hogwarts (Rowling *Sorcerer’s* 202). The Resurrection Stone Harry gets from Dumbledore through Dumbledore’s will (Rowling *Deathly* 126). However, it’s encased in the golden snitch, and it takes a while before Harry realizes that it’s in there (Rowling *Deathly* 431). It takes longer still for Harry to actually get the Stone out of the snitch (Rowling *Deathly* 698).

How Harry acquires the Elder Wand is a lot more complicated than either of other two. The Elder Wand changes owners by whomever disarms the previous master (Rowling *Deathly* 412). Some people (incorrectly) believe that the ownership of the Elder Wand moves to whomever kills the previous owner. For example, one of the last owners of the Elder Wand was Albus Dumbledore, who was killed by Severus Snape (Rowling *Half* 596). However, moments before Dumbledore is killed, Draco Malfoy disarms Dumbledore of the Elder Wand, and so becomes the proper owner (Rowling *Half* 584).

When Harry, Ron and Hermione are at Malfoy Manor in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Harry is able to force Draco’s wand from his hands (474), and so becomes the master

of the Elder Wand. However, Voldemort believes that whomever kills the previous owner is the true master, and so he kills Snape (Rowling *Deathly* 656). Later, in the final battle between Harry and Voldemort, Harry realizes that he was the master of the Elder Wand, and not Voldemort (Rowling *Deathly* 743). And so, with the power of the Ultimate Boon with him, Harry is able to defeat Voldemort once and for all.

The entire Initiation process takes care of the hero battling the forces of evil (but to no ultimate avail), and then finally learning what must be done to completely defeat the power of evil. After the Initiation comes the hero's Return to the familiar world. This process might start with the hero's Refusal to Return. The hero might not be sure on how to communicate what he learned in the unfamiliar world to the people back in the familiar world, back home (Campbell 193). Eventually, though, the hero realizes that he needs to return for the good of everyone.

In Harry's case, the Return is defeating Voldemort once and for all, and returning to the world without Voldemort. However, he learns soon after Snape is killed that a part of Voldemort's soul actually resides in him and so, in order to fully defeat Voldemort, Harry must die—at Voldemort's hand (Rowling *Deathly* 687). Harry's Refusal of the Return occurs when he willingly goes to die at Voldemort's hand (Rowling *Deathly* 704).

Eventually, the time will come when the hero will need to Cross the Return Threshold. After realizing the broader world, this could be difficult for the hero. "The returning hero, to complete his adventure, must survive the impact of the world" (Campbell 226). In Harry's case, the Crossing of the Return Threshold occurs after the dream sequence in King's Cross with Dumbledore, when Harry comes back from the dead (Rowling *Deathly* 724). Notice that this is not when the Return actually occurs—it is merely the beginning of the Return. After this, Harry must still fight Voldemort and defeat him once and for all.

After Harry comes back from the dead, he plays dead until the right moment so that Voldemort doesn't actually kill him, and so needs some help. This is called the Rescue from Without (Campbell 207). Voldemort still has one Horcrux: his snake, Nagini. Without Nagini dead, Voldemort still cannot properly die. Therefore, the Rescue from Without occurs when Neville beheads Nagini with the sword of Godric Gryffindor (Rowling *Hallows* 733).

Something that may happen next, especially if the Ultimate Boon was acquired against the guardian's will, is the Magical Flight. "[The] last stage of the mythological round becomes a lively, often comical, pursuit" (Campbell 197). In *Harry Potter*, the Ultimate Boon overall was not taken from the Boon's guardian, if we take the guardian to be Dumbledore—he gave Harry two of the three (the Invisibility Cloak [Rowling *Sorcerer's* 202] and the Resurrection Stone [Rowling *Deathly* 126]). However, the last Hallow, the Elder Wand, was taken by Voldemort from Dumbledore's grave (Rowling *Deathly* 501).

Voldemort then becomes the guardian of the Elder Wand. With Harry actually being the master of the Elder Wand, he most certainly acquired it against the guardian's (Voldemort's) will. Therefore, after Nagini is killed by Neville and Harry shows that he is still alive, Harry and Voldemort fight, with Harry triumphing and leaving Voldemort dead, his killing curse rebounded (Rowling *Deathly* 743).

Having successfully completing his adventure, the hero is now the Master of the Two Worlds. "Freedom to pass back and forth across the world division, from the perspective of the apparitions of time to that of the casual deep and back—not contaminating the principles of the one by virtue of the other—is the talent of the master" (Campbell 229). Harry, being the proper master of all three of the Deathly Hallows, is master over death—Voldemort's entire goal. He can do what he wants with the Hallows. He decides to leave the Resurrection Stone in the

Forbidden Forest, where he dropped it (Rowling *Hallows* 703), and to put the Elder Wand back into Dumbledore's tomb. The Invisibility Cloak he's going to keep, because he's had it for so long, and he sees no reason to get rid of it (Rowling *Hallows* 749). After making this decision, Harry says, "I've had enough trouble for a lifetime" (qtd. in Rowling *Hallows* 749).

In addition to being the Master of the Two Worlds, the hero, having defeated the evil that has plagued the land, has the Freedom to Live as he chooses (Campbell 243). For Harry, this means marrying Ginny Weasley, and having three children: James, Albus Severus, and Lily (Rowling *Hallows* 753).

Joseph Campbell's "The Hero's Journey" has given many storytellers a framework for their stories ever since first recognizing the pattern. One of these storytellers who took advantage of this knowledge was J.K. Rowling with her *Harry Potter* books. Through the use of "The Hero's Journey, Rowling was able to tell a story that has defined a generation and will be remembered for quite some time. As Alan Rickman (Severus Snape in the movies) put so well, "When I'm 80 years old and sitting in my rocking chair, I'll be reading Harry Potter. And my family will say to me, 'After all this time?' And I will say, 'Always'" (deanhasthetardis).

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