

The Archetypal Night Journey

A plot line where a major character, literally or symbolically, goes through hell and emerges a better person reinforces a particular literary archetype called a night journey...

- a. The hero suffers from a moral or spiritual crisis.
- b. The hero seeks or is told to seek knowledge, insight, or solutions in hell or the underworld.
- c. The hero, often accompanied by a wise guide, initiates his journey.
- d. The hero recognizes that his environment is, literally or figuratively, hell or the underworld because he is among those who are physically or morally dead.
- e. The hero, after observing or speaking to the dead, gains knowledge and understanding about morality, life and himself.
- f. At the bottom of his descent into hell, the hero often finds himself facing a devil, who tempts and confuses him and whom he must somehow battle and defeat before returning home.

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Hell Visitors of Old

The journey to the underworld of the dead has been a favorite part of epic storylines, and it is also a literary tradition adopted by cinema in the last century. Scriptwriters never forget to include a dramatic visit to the underworld, regardless of the age or maturity of the hero. Since the age of myth, fully shaped heroes or heroes-to-be have traveled through horror-filled exotic worlds to rescue suffering souls. No doubt, the experience is more impressive when it is part of a hero's journey of initiation.

Old myths tell of journeys to the underworld to challenge death, to attempt to triumph in the realm of the dead, and to free those suffering there. The gods allowed Orpheus to enter Hades to rescue his wife Eurydice, but they did not let him make a single mistake: He looked back in mistrust and lost her forever. This myth inspired the script of *What Dreams May Come*. The film tells the journey of an ordinary man who decides to go to Hades to save his wife who had committed suicide. The art department of *What Dreams May Come* looked to the aesthetics of Dante's *Divine Comedy* for inspiration. *Moulin Rouge!*, by Baz Luhrman, is another personal and tragic version of Orpheus, whose main character cannot avoid separation from his beloved.

A quick glance at other journeys to Hades shows a series of classic myths that have served as models for modern storytellers. In his last journey, Hercules went into Hades to capture Cerberus; along the way, he rescued Theseus, who was suffering the penalty of the chair of oblivion. It was Theseus's ill reward for challenging the god of the underworld to free Persephone, the goddess of spring, who was kidnapped by Hades. Theseus had to look for Persephone because, when she entered Hades, the world sank into perpetual winter.

A Sumero-Babylonian epic tells of the giant Gilgamesh's journey into Hades in search of immortality. In the Middle Ages, Nordic Edda tells a story similar to that of Persephone's, with thundering Thor as the main character: Thor goes into Utgard, the infernal dwelling of trolls, to prevent the wedding between goddess Freya, symbol of fertility, and the king of giants because the wedding would have tragic consequences for nature.

De profundis clamo ad Te, Domine!

Film heroes act like their mythological models and usually must venture into underworlds to rescue those suffering torments or death threats. Vietnam movies, such as *Missing in Action* and *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, tell the stories of veterans who return to the hellish jungle in search of imprisoned comrades years after the war's end. In these pictures of the 1980s, which started a popular trend in cinema, the main characters are moved by solidarity with the prisoners of war and, above all, by the sheer desire to wash away their country's humiliation after the defeat in Vietnam.

Oskar Schindler of *Schindler's List* is another visitor to Hades. In Schindler's personal journey, Hades is the Holocaust, represented by the Plaszow extermination camp, where Jewish people await the "final solution." In one of the crudest scenes, Schindler watches the horror as Allied armies advance and SS soldiers try to get rid of the corpses. The vision of this hell makes such an impression on Schindler that, from then on, he does everything in his power to save from death as many people as he can. The following is the Dantesque scene created by the film's screenwriter, Stephen Zaillian:

Bodies being exhumed out of the earth, out of the mass graves in the forest. The dead lay everywhere, victims of the ghetto massacre, victims of Plaszow.

Arriving, Schindler sees Goeth standing up at the tree line. Approaching him, furious, he hesitates. He sees a wheelbarrow trundled by Pfefferberg, a corpse in it.

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JUNG ARCHETYPES

Characters

A. The Hero – Lord Raglan in The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth,

and Drama contends that this archetype is so well defined that the life of the protagonist can be clearly divided into a series of well-marked adventures, which strongly suggest a ritualistic pattern. Raglan finds that traditionally the hero's mother is a virgin, the circumstances of his conception are unusual, and at birth some attempt is made to kill

him. He is, however, spirited away and reared by foster parents. We know almost nothing of his childhood, but upon reaching manhood he returns to his future kingdom. After a victory over the king or a wild beast, he marries a princess, becomes king, reigns uneventfully, but later loses favor with the gods. He is then driven from the city after which he meets a mysterious death, often at the top of a hill. His body is not buried; but nevertheless, he has one or more holy sepulchers. Characters who exemplify this archetype to a greater or lesser extent are Oedipus, Theseus, Romulus, Perseus, Jason, Dionysos, Joseph, Moses, Elijah, Jesus Christ, Siegfried, Arthur, Robin Hood, Watu Gunung (Javanese), and Llew Llawgyffes (Celtic).

B. The Scapegoat – An animal or more usually a human whose death in a public ceremony expiates some taint or sin that has been visited upon a community (e.g., Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery").

C. The Outcast – A figure who is banished from a social group for some crime against his fellow man. The outcast is usually destined to become a wanderer from place to place (e.g., Cain, the Wandering Jew, the Ancient Mariner).

D. The Devil Figure – Evil incarnate, this character offers worldly goods, fame, or knowledge to the protagonist in exchange for possession of his soul (e.g., Lucifer, Mephistopheles, Satan, the Faust legend).

E. The Woman Figure

1. The Earthmother – Symbolic of fruition, abundance and fertility, this character traditionally offers spiritual and emotional nourishment to those with whom she comes in contact (e.g., Mother Nature, Mother Country, alma mater).

2. The Temptress – Characterized by sensuous beauty, this woman is one to whom the protagonist is physically attracted and who ultimately brings about his downfall (e.g., Delilah, the Sirens, Cleopatra).

3. The Platonic Ideal – This woman is a source of inspiration and a spiritual ideal, for whom the protagonist or author has an intellectual rather than a physical attraction (e.g., Dante's Beatrice, Petrarch's Laura, most Shelleyan heroines).

4. The Unfaithful Wife – A woman, married to a man she sees as dull unimaginative, is physically attracted to a more virile and desirable man (e.g., Guinevere, Madame Bovary, Anna Karenina, Lady Chatterly).

F. The Star-Crossed lovers – A young man and woman enter an ill-

fated love affair which ends tragically in the death of either or both of the lovers (e.g., Romeo and Juliet, West Side Story, Tristan and Isolde, Hero and Leander).

Situations

A. The Quest – This motif describes the search for someone or some talisman which, when found and brought back, will restore fertility to a wasted land, the desolation of which is mirrored by a leader's illness and disability. Jessie L. Weston's From Ritual to Romance traces one facet of this archetype through the quests of Gawain, Perceval, and Galahad for the Holy Grail. This situation is also used in Tennyson's Idylls of the King, as well as in shorter poems by Morris, Browning, and Arnold. Ahab's monomaniacal quest for the albino whale in Moby Dick is a variation on this archetype.

B. The Task – To save the kingdom, to win the fair lady, to identify himself so that he may reassume his rightful position, the Hero must perform some nearly superhuman deed (e.g., Odysseus must string the bow, Arthur must pull the sword from the stone, Beowulf must slay Grendel).

C. The Initiation – This usually takes the form of an initiation into life, that is, the depiction of an adolescent coming into maturity and adulthood with all the attendant problems and responsibilities that this process involves. An awakening, awareness, or an increased perception of the world and the people in it usually forms the climax of this archetypal situation (e.g., Holden Caulfield, Huckleberry Finn, Stephen Dedalus, Eugene Gant).

D. The Journey – Usually combined with any or all of the foregoing situational archetypes, the journey is used to send the Hero in search of information or some intellectual truth. A common employment of the journey archetype is the descent into hell (e.g., Odyssey, Aeneid, Inferno, Endymion, Joyce's Ulysses). A second use of this pattern is the depiction of a limited number of travelers on an airplane flight, sea voyage, bus ride, or walking trip for the purpose of isolating them and using them as a microcosm of society (e.g., The Canterbury Tales, Ship of Fools).

E. The Fall – This archetype describes a descent from a higher to a lower being. The experience involves spiritual defilement and/or a loss of innocence and bliss. The Fall is also usually accompanied by expulsion from a kind of paradise as penalty for disobedience and moral transgression (e.g., Paradise Lost, Billy Budd).

F. Death and Rebirth – The most common of all situational archetypes, this Motif grows out of the parallel between the cycle of nature and the cycle of life. Thus, morning and springtime represent birth, youth, or rebirth; evening and winter suggest old age or death. Anthropologists believe that fertility rites and vegetative rituals usually took place in the spring because this is the time of physical regeneration of Nature, an appropriate time to enact ritualistic statements of spiritual rebirth and

resurrection.

Symbols and Associations

The collective unconscious makes certain associations between the outside world and psychic experiences. These associations become enduring and are passed from one generation to the next. Some of the more common archetypal associations are as follows:

A. Light-Darkness – Light usually suggests hope, renewal or intellectual illumination; darkness implies the unknown, ignorance, or despair (e.g., "Dover Beach").

B. Water-Desert – Because water is necessary to life and growth, it commonly appears as a birth or rebirth symbol. It is archetypally significant, anthropologists believe, that water is used in baptismal services, which solemnize spiritual birth. Similarly, the appearance of rain in a work of literature can suggest a character's regeneration or rebirth (e.g., The Ancient Mariner). Conversely, the aridity of the desert is often associated with spiritual sterility and desiccation (e.g., The Waste Land).

C. Heaven-Hell – Man has traditionally associated parts of the universe not accessible to him with the dwelling places of the primordial forces that govern his world. The skies and mountain tops house his gods; the bowels of the earth contain the diabolic forces that inhabit his universe (e.g., Mount Olympus, the Underworld, Paradise Lost, The Divine Comedy).

<http://www.jcjc.cc.ms.us/faculty/humanities/pwedgeworth/JungArchetypes.htm>