Senior Honors Projects, 2010-current   Honors College

Spring 2018

The mythological perspective of modern media: Cross-cultural consciousness and modern myths

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The Mythological Perspective of Modern Media:

Cross-Cultural Consciousness and Modern Myths

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An Honors College Project Presented to

the Faculty of the Undergraduate

College of Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication

James Madison University

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May 2018

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Writing, Rhetoric and Technical Communication, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

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PUBLIC PRESENTATION

This work is accepted for presentation, in part or in full, at the Honors Symposium on April 18, 2018.

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Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Dr. Gumnior, who had confidence and enthusiasm about this project even when I was struggling, and guided me through three semesters of hard work, stress, and tears. Her guidance helped this paper grow from simple origins and a confused thesis into the full-fledged statement it has become.

I would also like to thank my mother, who always answered my phone calls when I needed her to.

And lastly, my thanks to those who wrote down the myths of their cultures, so that we could one day read them, and dream of ancient times.

Abstract:

This piece assesses the cultural implications of modern narratives that incorporate classical mythology, specifically focusing on the hero's journey. When the similarities of different myths across different cultures are analyzed, it becomes clear that there are modern analogs that incorporate mythic qualities and cultural values. These mythic foundations are analyzed here in popular works like *Harry Potter*, *Star Trek*, and *Legend of Zelda*, where the hero's journey becomes an almost universal experience that inspires cross-cultural consciousness. The hero's journey has evolved from a simple literary tool into a cross-cultural touchstone that shapes narratives into familiar works of cultural significance across new media, incorporating new values and cultural ideals that allow the audience to learn about cultures outside of their own in a positive experience. Because modern media incorporates aspects of myth, that media is both familiar and transformative and has brought new and widened perspectives of cultures across the globe. This in turn creates a cross-cultural consciousness that arises from shared media, whether that is in the form of movies, books, games, or otherwise, and shows how classical mythology is still an important artifact and foundation that influences modern culture and media.

Introduction:

      Myths are the commonality of cultures. There is no culture, long lost or thriving, that does not have myths in some form and is not influenced by those myths. Greek and Roman civilizations are seen as two of the most mythologically rich cultures in history, and their myths and philosophies are still taught to students across the world. These cultures are the most common examples that modern media and literature draw from because of the wealth of materials that remain from storytellers like Homer; however, the wealth of other cultures' myths are just as vibrant, expansive, and popular. From Asian to African to Native American to Norse, there is an endless bank of mythological and religious texts that are even deeper sources for modern adaptations. When exploring these various mythologies and comparing them to one another, it is easy to see that the collective human experience runs along similar lines. Myths may develop insularly, but it is clear by looking at the global body of myths that sharing myths is common among all cultures (the strongest example of which are the ties between Greek and Roman culture). "Myth" is merely the most common term used to describe the traditional stories that have survived from past cultures. These stories are at the center of every religion and moral system, and even many modern fantasy novel or action movies. They create the patterns that each culture and society follows in their storytelling, whether it is through written word, film, or games. According to Mary Midgley in "The Myths We Live By," myths are "imaginative patterns, networks of powerful symbols that suggest particular ways of interpreting the world." (2011, p. 1). The narrative structures of myths then grow from the urge to explain the world and to pass on history and moral lessons. In addition, because of the consistent use of myths throughout the ages in every culture, they are also the foundation of modern literature and media in every culture.

The patterns of ancient myths are repeated in modern media and literature, with minor changes to make them fresh and interesting in the modern context because of an increased depth of imagination and ability. There are different versions of many myths across and within cultures that circulate today, similar (or the same) in terms of characters, motivations, and plot lines (Doherty, 2001, p. 9). All of these versions, when combined, embody the mythic sources of cultures. Without myths, and the pattern of human longing for adventure and growth that accompanies them, the rich culture of literature and media today would not exist. Any changes that transcend the traditional narrative boundaries of the time and place set by ancient myths create an impression of originality—because of the context in which they are read, as modern examples of creativity and collectivity—and thus suggest new ways of interpreting the contemporary world.

The reason that audiences are still captivated by these stories is linked to the sense of cultural consciousness and remembrance. Audiences seek out and respond to patterns within modern narratives that are structured around the historical origins of tales and myths and therefore push a recognizable order and structure. The underlying mythic tones of a story enhances its credibility and relatability, and by conforming to the themes and practices of the ancient storytellers, the narrative becomes distantly familiar and more easily consumable. The "powerful thrill of recognition" that readers experience by reading, watching, and playing with myths helps to connect the mythic to the new narrative, and lend a sense of authenticity because of its ties to the collective origin of storytelling (Goodrich, 1962, p. XIII). Moreover, it pulls readers in with classic storytelling hidden in a new narrative, retaining the same, essential storytelling factors that have been employed for centuries. There is a continual cycle of creativity

and inspiration, leading to the forms of art in literature and media we have today, that transcend the boundaries of genre and medium.

The forms of these stories have evolved with the rise of technology, ranging from oral traditions to the visuals of cinematography and even the altered reality of virtual-reality headsets. More importantly though, modern narratives are constantly evolving to adapt modern themes like diversity and concepts such as "own voices," (see Chapter 3)—authors sharing their own experience through narratives in modern stories. Classical stories have survived for countless years because of how they resonate with readers as cyclical narratives of adventure, success, and suffering. These tales are remembered for their cultural importance and their heroes, and continue to influence newer narratives. These narratives shape, form, and nurture the shared cultural consciousness that spans every culture's myths and thriving community. But the bones of the foundation remain, solid and reliable, utterly familiar, and myths continue to thrive as tangible forms of cultural identity. In turn, mythology remains a piece of shareable human culture that spans across the globe, with commonalities or unique traits that can be identified and researched in a multitude of ways in and out of their initial cultural context.

Connections between classical mythology and current literature and media are bountiful. Today, our mythology revolves around epics of every genre, from science-fiction movies like *Star Wars* and *Guardians of the Galaxy* to nonfiction that revolves around the pseudo-deification of people like former US Presidents or star athletes. From *Star Trek* and its countless spinoffs to *Harry Potter* and the literary universe that captured the attention of millions, and even branching out to the interactive forms of video games, there is a recognizable theme that highlights the parallels between modern culture and mythology. A consistent theme in classical mythology is the journey that the protagonist undergoes to become a true hero. These myths may have been

considered historical reality to those who lived in ancient times (Barthes, 1972, p. 142), but there is no way to properly date the mythologies seen today from this period. These myths could have already been ancient to the people who wrote them down from the oral traditions of earlier peoples, but the theme is consistent. Myths revolve around the protagonist of each tale, the hero, and how that hero moves through their traditional or modern narrative.

This paper will assess the cultural implications of modernizing mythology and narratives that incorporate changing values in the concept of cross-cultural consciousness with the proliferation of media. It also takes a deeper look at how heroism is incorporated in modern media and literature and how that has inspired cross-cultural relevance in today's society. In Chapter 1, I will discuss the various types of myth and genre and how they relate to and define the concept of the hero and the hero's journey, as well as introduce various forms of criticism. In the Chapter 2, I address four examples of modern media and their myth analogues, including popular examples like the *Harry Potter* series and the *Star Trek* oeuvre. In Chapter 3, I explore the concept of cross-cultural consciousness and modern perspectives that permeate current modern media.

Chapter 1: The Types of Myth and Heroes

  Stories in the modern era are categorized by their genre, creating blurred lines of qualifiers that are frequently crossed to create new stories. These genres range from nonfiction to fantasy to romance to science fiction, and there are countless ways to analyze each form of story and their mediums. Classical myths, however, are generally put into just a few categories: religious (creation myths), philosophical (ethics), or fantastical (folk tales). These genres are the foundations for the more modern categories—and each can be split down and analyzed according to the various types of myths that are explored through their common themes and morals. Myths run the gamut of modern genres, though they are usually relegated to religious, fantasy and science fiction in terms of their subjects and settings. Genres encompass all types of myths, address the themes, morals, and life-lessons shared within each story, and may push certain types of stories to the back of the pile in terms of current cultural relevance. Myths at their most basic levels are traditional stories that often relate tales of creation, heroism, or of lessons to be learned. Typically viewed at a religious slant, it is impossible to separate a culture's values from its myths. Myths are valued because of what they contribute to society—namely those morals, themes, and life-lessons that can be translated to apply to real-life situations, and are a valuable aspect of ancient cultures. In this way, myths are viewed as relics of the past—but myths are very much alive in modern culture because of how they are viewed as teaching tools. Effort is put into preserving them on large scales—there are hundreds of translations of any Greek or Roman myth out there, fewer of Asian myths, and even fewer of African. These myths are studied and shared, and have informed the genres that have come to be and the types of myth that are seen in modern media.

  The most common types of myths are creation myths and coming-of-age myths. Creation myths have relevance across all cultures, and often contain familiar themes (which can be called

tropes without losing their significance). Light is separated from dark, or conquers it altogether, a supreme being created or birthed other beings, a supreme evil is conquered or trapped. The Mayan people's creation myth held that the universe was created from the two beings, Tepeu and Gucumatz, who thought the earth into creation, and later made humans from corn, beans, and water (Leeming and Leeming, 1995, p. 19). There are even separate creation myths within cultures, as seen with the Apache people. Some hold that their people were birthed from the underground onto the surface. Others, that the Great Spirit created the world in four days, then other beings like himself, then animals, and then people (Leeming and Leeming, 1995, p.1). These inconsistent creation myths are still evidence of traditions that hold true across cultures— there are generally central figures (that can loosely be considered heroes) who are revered because of their power and status at the beginning of time and their role in creating or influencing the culture their myth resides in. These are the "heroes" that created the people of the earth, and are thus worshipped as bringers of life because they are the propagators of a culture. Across time, this motif is a prevalent example of how humans explain their own existence, and subsequently their perceptions of themselves as heroic figures.

The central figure in every myth and story, whether they are god, human, or otherwise, undergoes a transformative process. That central figure is the hero, and their journey guides the narrative and gives it a clear plot. Every culture has a different version of a "hero." The closest that research has come to declaring a true definition is from Joseph Campbell's "The Hero with a Thousand Faces," in which he asserts that the hero is "the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms" (2008, p. 14). In the telling and retelling of myths, the journey of the hero is their struggle towards a form of fictitious deification that lends itself naturally to forming a good narrative.

Essentially, the hero is a valued member of society because they have placed themselves into a position above society by going through a series of life-altering endeavors. The hero of each myth or story is irrevocably transformed by their journey from a normal member of their society into a reborn and renewed figure of perfection or eternal glory, elevated from the banalities of normal life by their ordeals. To be considered a hero, however, the chosen man or woman must first complete the journey that will change their entire existence. Without the journey, the hero lacks the necessary experience of suffering that makes them human and relatable to the culture their story is being told in.

The journey is multi-layered and life-changing, and begins with the departure, the moment when the hero leaves what has been their life up to this point to begin an adventure, often to solve a problem or to find something or someone (Campbell, 2008, p.28). This is the impetus of change in the life of the hero, and the first turning point. Heroes leave what is familiar and face the unfamiliar in order to grow. The hero encounters any number of obstacles in their path, such as physical challenges (shipwrecks, fires, battles) and emotional challenges (jealous lovers, hostile family members, loss and grief). The nature of these obstacles has not changed in any significant sense because they are an enduring part of the human experience across any cultural boundary. The journey usually culminates in a physical conflict between the hero and the enemy that ends with the victorious hero claiming their reward of love and power, or equally often with the completion of some superhuman task. After claiming victory, the hero will often recreate their journey in reverse, returning home in the same way they departed. This is often used as the final major plot-point, though it can be problematic and bittersweet. The hero has been changed by their journey and is attempting to return to their former existence. Campbell suggests that when a hero returns to their society the newly victorious heroes are frequently

recognized, but are also frequently spurned by their unchanged homes (2008, p. 29-30). According to Campbell in the televised series "Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth," the hero's journey is a cycle of "a going and a return" which in turn means the hero is working in a continual circle of a quest that not only involves completing a physically demanding task, but also affects their psychology and sense of self in surprising ways. This evolution is part of what creates the appeal of myths, and creates the deepest foundation of recognizable narrative. The cyclical nature means that heroes are ever-changing and adapting to their newest sense of self and journey.

The hero's journey is custom-tailored to each tale to create engaging narratives. The classical example of the hero's journey has been reiterated throughout history and remains in popular circulation, where it draws on the ancient myths and finds expression in modern stories that focus on common problems, journeys, and epic accomplishments in a newer context. The hero's journey is a necessary component of any story, and the hero in literature and modern mythology as we know it wouldn't exist without the solid roots of classical myths. The classical examples of the hero's journey are still conveyed through modern storytelling in movies and literature, and as cross-cultural consciousness develops, narratives evolve with them to adjust to growing awareness of themes rooted in past societies. There is a transition from outdated modes and values into the updated forms and cultural contexts. But even as myths transition into modern narratives, basic structure remains intact, and we see the repetition of narratives like creation and coming-of-age myths across generations.

The coming of age myth is a tradition where the hero embarks on their journey at a young age and returns as an older, more jaded version of themselves. In this type of story, readers watch the hero grow and change, often at high personal cost. Different cultures have different types of

rituals that celebrate when a person has come of age, and myths and narratives that follow these myths often incorporate those rituals as a form of confirmation and reassurance to their audience. Furthermore, the myths that are often intended as moral lessons or are of thematic importance are targeted at specific age-groups, confirming the relevance of separating the types of myth to ascertain their specific audience. Other myths focus on the traditions of royalty, still more focus on a magical hero's quest that will save the world (appropriate for any age). Myths are a basic form of storytelling that focuses less on the format and more on the narrative itself—how the story is presented in a cultural context, what the myth is saying about that culture, and how the characters within the narrative are represented within a culture.

Myths are united by their cultural relevance and how they form a story that shares a moral lesson or creation story. Their basics, however, are how we separate the types of myth and their relevance within each culture. Therefore, we see similar myths from completely separate cultures: the values and morals meant to be taught in the context of the culture are very similar across the board as human-centric values. Each has developed from a rhetorical position that guides how the narrative is meant to be understood as a cultural identity or artifact, from promoting ideas about how certain people should act at different ages to passing on traditions and behaviors to successive generations. The persuasiveness of these types of myth is used to encourage members of the culture to follow specific paths, fit into societal roles, and perpetuate the norm. Rhetoric in myths is a form of social commentary that is meant to guide members of that culture through pivotal experiences.

We see this most of all in coming-of-age tales, meant to provide wisdom and guidance to younger generations. The expectation is that myths will guide them as they mature, which is part of the reason it is encouraged to expose children to these tales. We also see a specific rhetorical

position of cultural identity in "damsel-in-distress" myths, which are often more subversive and rely on the cultural dominance of patriarchal societies. These stories can be defined by categories known as tropes, storytelling devices that are easily understood by a given audience because they are recognizable pieces of the narrative itself. Tropes can be very broad or unerringly specific—from the "dead parents" trope to the "sidekick best friend" trope. Tropes themselves have come to define how myths are used in modern narratives. They help facilitate discussion about both classical and modern literature and media, especially discussion that focuses on identifying aspects of the narratives and connecting them to previous narratives and tales. The tropes that are popular today are recognizable in, and originated from, ancient myth.

However, more and more often modern narratives are turning tropes on their head, bringing diversity and non-traditional character archetypes into the fold of the narrative. Tropes are a valuable aspect of the narrative—they give the audience a chance to identify key characters and plotlines and to explore the identity of the hero. The hero is a dependable aspect of the myth because the hero figure itself is a trope. As the central figure, any number of tropes and requirements can be applied to their character, creating the archetypes that can be fitted to any culture or genre, but the hero also exists as the foundational trope that the narrative is based on.

The hero is the central figure in any type of myth, and fits any number of tropes while they undergo a personal journey or quest to save the world. Just as there are many, many types of myth, there are many types of heroes tailored for each journey. Heroes are byproducts of the culture they originate in. European cultures see heroes that are white, Asian cultures see heroes that are Asian; African cultures see heroes that are African. These simple qualifiers separate heroes on various levels, but it can be reliably noted that each hero is most often male, in a position of power, and desirable. This trend is unsurprising, as the majority of myths that have

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survived over the years come from male authors, and the male perspective upholds more positive images of male heroes than it does of female characters in general. Even in modern culture where diversity is growing, male heroes vastly outnumber female and nonbinary heroes. The hero as the central figure sets up the narrative to showcase a specific journey of growth. The hero who undergoes the journey is placed in a situation that grows their understanding of themselves and the world around them in the form of accomplishing a great task (which may involve saving the world). However, that specific journey, and the hero themselves, are not always traditional. Heroism is, at its heart, relative. Relative to the culture's stories and perspectives of heroism, relative to the task they are completing, and even relative to the morals and lessons that are addressed in each narrative. A hero is often held up to standards as the ideal member of their society and an ideal example of cultural values. This creates a narrative reliability for those who consume the myths and narratives. Based on the narrative they inhabit, each type of hero serves a specific aspect of that reliability. Whether they suffer or succeed, the hero's narrative relies on an underlying tension that addresses what kind of hero they are. The non-traditional hero, such as the heroine or anti-hero, relies on that tension to pull their unfamiliar narrative into a more recognizable story that is more likely to be accepted as a popular work of literature.

The various types of myth encompass all different types of heroes because heroes would not exist without the myths. Their journey is an essential aspect of the narrative structure, and the different types of myth are skeletons that contain the necessary structure for fleshed out narratives—cultural quirks and identifying characteristics, mythic aspects that are specific to a culture, and the necessary changes that adjust for changing times and cultural values. The various types of myth are the overarching categories into which each hero finds their place, but there is

no type of myth that cannot be adjusted or tweaked to incorporate another aspect of some different genre, within which can be found the non-traditional heroes. The reason that myths are placed into these categories is for the ease of the audience and for the ease of our own analysis. The effect on the story itself may be negligible at a surface level, but helps us look at myths with a wider lens, placing them in a specific cultural context and relevance. This deeper awareness creates a valuable context that reveals the influences and foundations of narratives that have roots in myth.

Chapter 2: Modern Iterations & Rhetorical Analysis

      Even as the Oedipus myth has fallen out of polite favor and into comedic proportions in modern times because of its controversial themes, other myths and mythical creatures have had a resurgence of popularity in modern literature and media. From the inclusion of Classical Greek gods in a modern setting, such as Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series or his more recent "Magnus Chase" series that focuses on the Norse traditions, to the appearance of mythical monsters and creatures (such as the mermaids in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Rowling, 2000, chapter 26)), likened to the Sirens that appear in Greek and Roman myths), examples of mythos are emerging throughout the science-fiction/fantasy genres. These examples have emerged as the rebirth of the classical traditions, and as a form of modern mythology, where cultures adjust their narratives to rationalizes modern perspectives with mythic foundations. The hero's journey in more modern literature and media therefore evolved into a specific fulfillment of the classical pattern, paying homage to the traditions that built the foundation of mythic properties like gods and spirits but transforming them into new mythologies that rely on cultural context and relevance. Looking at the modern examples, this research uses the mythic perspective to analyze the internationally popular *Harry Potter* and *Star Trek* franchises to see how these prolific series have shaped an entirely new mythology in popular culture across national boundaries. The forms of criticism that address modern media and literature often address the context of the narrative, and analyze all forms and connotations of myth within its culture, from the basis of their story and personal journey to the archetypes of heroes and the genres of modern narratives.

      Examining the rhetorical role of the hero's journey offers an interesting perspective on any narrative that has a hero. The journey that the hero undergoes is transformative and carries weight in that it has an impact beyond the hero in the sense that it is foremost a persuasive

narrative. The hero serves as the figurehead of the narrative—they are revered for their changed sense of self, but are feared because of their newly-adjusted views. Because of this, the hero plays an interesting role in the narrative as a prime example of a member of their culture. Their experience is valued, but also shunned. The journey itself is the focus of the narrative, where their personal growth is a guide for the reader. How the hero deals with trials, obstacles, loss, and success forms the meat of a story and the bulk of its narrative. Hitting the traditional points of a mythic narrative means that each hero undergoes a similar journey, with variations on the themes of villains, emotional intensity, and the methods with which the hero achieves their goals, and serves as a role model for readers. In this, we discover mythos, an aspect of myth itself as the conveyor of lessons—moral, spiritual, or interpersonal. Mythos describes the recurring themes and plots of myths within a specific culture, and addresses the traditional beliefs and prevalent cultural attitudes that are conveyed through myths. This term is most commonly used to reference specific scenes from myths, and analyze the basic qualities of the story itself. In turn, mythic criticism guides the analysis of myths and modern media and literature in terms of the foundational formulas and underlying archetypes, and looks at how similar trends show up in different cultures, like the myths that involve stealing fire from gods, great floods that wipe out entire populations, and the hero's journey.

Campbell outlined the concept of the hero's journey in order to define the traditional form of a narrative, and that journey is the clear connection between classical and modern mythic tales. The narrative of myth itself is an adjusted view of the hero and their journey. Readers react to the narrative emotionally because the hero is the audience surrogate, and they are connecting to the hero because of what they, as readers, are getting from the narrative. This form of pathos relies heavily on the connection that readers make with the story and how they connect it to

narratives they are already familiar with. This is especially easy to do with media that draw heavily from myths remembered from childhood or taught in schools. Audiences familiar with classical Greek and Roman myths recognize narratives that draw from those myths, and are drawn to them because of that familiarity. In fact, the rhetorical role of the familiar narrative is to draw in the audience and create an emotional connection between audience and hero who is still the central character driving the narrative and keeping the audience engaged. When exploring a narrative, mythic criticism relies on looking underneath the surface to perceive the influences they have on a piece of literature. By keeping that foundation in mind, modern narratives can be viewed with a keen eye towards preserving those elements that influenced the media and literature that we consume today.

When the lens of the critical mythic perspective is turned towards the *Harry Potter* series, the reader sees the wildly imaginative wizarding world created by J.K. Rowling in 1998. Harry's journey begins soon after birth, which is a common theme. According to Robert Segal in his introduction to Otto Rank's work "The Myth of the Birth of the Hero," "Heroism can even go back to infancy, with birth and survival the chief feats." (2004, p. vii). Harry's triumph over Voldemort in his infancy is the perfect example of this phenomenon, where his journey begins without conscious thought. Furthermore, the wishes of the hero are not often taken into consideration when it comes to the larger whole of their journey, and Dumbledore's decision to place Harry with the Dursleys is a perfect example. In the clutches of the Dursley family, Harry's journey is almost uniformly traditional. He was not in control of any aspect of his situation, from his magic to his family. The beginning of his journey happens when Rubeus Hagrid takes Harry away from the home of the Dursleys and transports him to his first experience in the wizarding world, the act of which is also not a unique beginning to a journey. Harry's subsequent

introduction into the wizarding world serves as a culture shock more than anything else, and his remarkable adaptation to it shows that his departure still wasn't so much a conscious journey towards the eventual defeat of his enemy (which we see in myths where the protagonist is already an adult), but rather an unconscious search for belonging and an evolution of his sense of self. Harry's escape from his deprived childhood and the trauma associated with it is part of his physical journey, but also show how his sense of self changes as a psychological evolution throughout a timeline that is a coming-of-age situation. Readers watch Harry deal with a journey he is woefully underprepared for at all stages, and are meant to grow alongside him.

After Harry's departure with Hagrid, he travels to his initiation at Hogwarts, the British wizarding school and while working to survive his first year, he faces struggles that he is ill-equipped to deal with. With the addition of a magic wand, a few plucky friends and an unfortunately loose-mouthed groundskeeper, he is able to complete the first stage of his journey and open up the series for the next six books. Like other classical heroes, Harry himself has changed irrevocably in this second stage, and the destination of his journey is becoming clear. The subsequent novels of the series show Harry's growth as a wizard and hero as he explores the unknown, overcomes various obstacles to achieve his goals, and defeats the villain of his tale. The novels also cover a more uncertain part of the hero's journey—that of Harry's reluctance to serve as the hero. Harry does not want to be the chosen one. He is aware of his journey, and of what is expected of him, but he is not in control of his journey. Harry is expected to listen to his elders and complete his duty, but, like many mythical heroes before him, his reluctance creates difficulties. Eventually Harry takes a more active part in his journey, and the reluctance disappears as he does so, but it is nevertheless an important piece of the journey.

Harry's ultimate resolution of that conflict concludes Rowling's take on the coming-of-age myth, with the epilogue of the last novel of the series (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*) serving as the final closure for readers and proving that Harry survived his journey and final task and took his rightful place in the wizarding world. This is one instance of going against tradition, however, as in classical literature a hero is just as often punished for their actions as they are rewarded. In the myth of Prometheus, who steals fire from the gods to share with the mortals of the world, the hero of man is punished by being chained to a rock. Every day an eagle eats his liver, which regrows during the night and makes his torture endless (Berger, 2013, p. 54). We see this tragic fate again in the original Hercules myth, where Hercules has achieved happiness, but the goddess Hera (Zeus' wife, but not Hercules' mother) makes Hercules go mad. In his madness Hercules kills his wife, Megara, and their three sons (Berger, 2013, p. 92)—and this sets Hercules on the path of his own "hero journey" to serve penance for his actions. Following those myths, Harry's tale becomes an evolution of the classical mythology and thus shows the appeal of Rowling's tales, in that she gives Harry a 'fairy-tale' ending rather than the more traditional, tragic ending, and readers are left generally satisfied with the outcome. This is also meant to serve as an analog for readers, in a time when fiction is pushing back boundaries and changing up the traditional format in order to attract readers. By giving Harry a happy ending, Rowling bucks the mythic forms we saw in Prometheus' and Hercules' myths, and creates something new out of something ancient.

The genres of science fiction and fantasy can also be seen as narratives portrayed through the cinema screen, with more visual appeal than literature, and with larger audiences. Increasingly popular ways to adapt myths and stories, movies capture the attention of an audience with a striking story and script, expressive visuals, and, more and more often, famous

actors. The narratives of movies tend to follow the classical traditions. Protagonists experience

their journey, sometimes accompanied by others, sometimes alone. That journey is the main

narrative or plot, and the hero is the protagonist who overcomes the challenges and obstacles that

block the path to success. Thus, the narrative form of myths and modern literature and media

contain similar forms of archetypes, which can show how myths evolve through time by

retaining most of their original form but inserting new characters and fanciful plots, reimagined

in the age of space or high fantasy. Archetypes are the most common examples of people,

themes, or things. These can range from the dashing starship-captain to the sage old man who

gives him advice, and cover all the bases for typical characters and their roles in myths or

narratives. Movies are the especially vivid form of these myths and archetypes, as a visual aspect

of mythos and communication through common symbols, and are an ideal vehicle for the

identification of common mythical themes and rhetoric because of their mass appeal and cultural

cross-over. From this, we can move into a discussion of the newest iteration of the vast *Star Trek*

universe—a prime example of mythic foundations in a futuristic setting.

Reintroduced in the *Star Trek* reboots, the first of which aired in cinemas in 2009

(Abrams), James "Jim" Tiberius Kirk is an example of a non-traditional hero who has a

traditional journey. Kirk's space journey begins when he is encouraged by Captain Pike to join

Starfleet, a futuristic version of NASA. Pike's exhortation provokes Kirk into beginning his

journey by calling on Kirk's ego and desire to emulate his late father. Pathos-based appeals such

as this one are the impetus to call the hero to action, and are a classic feature of myth. It is

demonstrated in Virgil's *Aeneid* as Aeneas first leaves Troy, and is implored by a vision of his

now-dead cousin, Hector, to leave Troy and found a great city in another land. Campbell calls

this "The Call to Adventure" (2008, p. 28), and we see Kirk's situation change drastically

afterwards, just as Aeneas' did. Answering the call, Kirk undergoes a transformation of status—from independent drifter to smug student. His transformation is seen from the standpoint of Kirk challenging the establishment of Starfleet in his life, separating Kirk from his peers because of attitude issues (that are also typical in many hero-figures). Kirk's insubordination is quickly forgotten as Starfleet faces its own difficulty in the form of a battle in space, and Kirk manages to take a slightly illegal but active part in the fray, earning himself a place in history. After successfully completing the space-centered part of his journey and rescuing Captain Pike, Kirk returns as the golden-child of Starfleet's flagship and becomes its new captain. In many ways, Kirk's journey mirrors the journey of Odysseus, the protagonist of The Odyssey.

After the fall of Troy, the hero Odysseus struggled to return to his wife and child. His journey was beset by nymphs, gods, and monsters, and Odysseus spent many long years trying to find his way to the place where he belonged, Ithaca. Kirk also faces perilous situations and violent villains, obstacles that threaten his chances at a successful end to his journey and create tension in the plot. At the end of his tale, Odysseus returns victorious and settles back into his life with his wife and son after killing many men and facing impossible hardships. For Kirk, however, the journey continues beyond that first cycle in an interestingly unique way. Instead of returning to Iowa triumphant, his home becomes the captain's chair in the USS Enterprise, and his crew becomes his family. This transfer of home and family results in an interesting twist of the narrative and its mythos. Overall, Kirk's story fulfills the classical points of narrative hero journey that Campbell describes. He undergoes his journey to greatness because it is required by his own ego, a challenge that stimulates his urge to prove himself, and viewers see him as a problematic hero because of it. Still, he follows the paths of the myth that has been laid out before him in this narrative, because otherwise the movie would lack a key component of a

successful story. The popularity of this franchise relies on the fact that Kirk's journey mirrors that of classical myth and that as the hero he is expected to succeed. The story of Captain Kirk and his loyal crew has continued in two more movies, with rumors for a fourth movie in the works. *Star Trek*'s popular movie franchise helps to confirm the overall popularity of the science fiction genre in film along with the continuation of the mythos connection throughout the various iterations of *Star Trek*, which are once again gaining traction in popular culture.

The new movies are a transmutation and mythopoesis even of the *Star Trek* universe itself. While literature and media draw heavily upon existing cultures and their closely held beliefs, some creators take a step further into the realm of myth using mythopoesis. Mythopoesis is the act of a storyteller creating a new mythology, used in a fictional story. This form of mythology is most often referred to as Tolkien's invention—he created a vast mythic structure that underlies the entirety of his famous *Lord of the Rings* novels—but it applies to the *Star Trek* universe as well. Mythopoesis is the making of new myths, and creators settle the structure of their fictional cultures around this frame. Each of their newly-minted myths addresses a different aspect of the fictional culture they have created, and are the lens through which analysis of the hero's journey specifically is possible from a rhetorical stance. As a reboot, the series is completely separate from the earlier television series "*Star Trek: The Original Series*," which had already produced other spin-off television shows and movies. The reboot, in the form of the cinematic universe created by J.J. Abrams, is an adaptation of that mythos, giving the director an artistic license that leads to more rebellion against the original format of the myth, in the form of creating a wormhole that creates parallel universes, so the reboot movies take place outside of the normal realm of *Star Trek*. The series continues to proliferate. In 2017, a new series of *Star Trek* was released, *Star Trek: Discovery*, that flipped the traditional hero role from a man to a

woman, who is the younger sister of Kirk's second-in-command, the Vulcan Spock. The new series continues to manipulate the lore and mythopoesis of this series, where the movies are halted until another film is made. This continual building around a central narrative has created a mini culture within the larger audience.

The director's creative mythopoesis is visible throughout the narrative of the film and gives space for the new narrative to take the place of the pre-existing story. The recognizable connection to an already beloved story appeals to the audience of that story (a fandom that has been around since the beginning of the series and continues to be a strong piece of geek culture) and gives new narrative depths by connecting them implicitly with neo-classical myths. The evolving narratives take the form of the modern or postmodern story and move previous iterations of myth into pop culture; just as classical myths serve as the foundations for modern narratives, older narratives (like the original *Star Trek* stories) can also serve as the foundation for modern narratives. This direct parallel proves that narratives are malleable and inspirational—there is a constant drive for recycled content that takes used narratives and transforms them into newly-consumable, "unique" content.

The original *Star Trek* is already a mythological journey, and now there is a reboot of that original that goes back to the beginning of that heroic journey. This deepens the mythology of that particular franchise, fleshing it out and filling in various details with new characters and lessons in the same universe. By creating this microcosm of mythology, and adjusting to place myth within a more timely and condensed narrative, the *Star Trek* movies, and new TV show, increase the appeal to previous fans of the show as well as the depth of the stories that are transforming classical myths into modern narratives that are relative to changed cultural values and ideals. This narrative trend is increasingly common today, where older stories are being

retold in modern settings, reprinted in new translations, or being transformed from the written word to a visual experience like film. These "new" narratives succeed because of that microcosm, where the familiarity of the narrative is based on the concept of nostalgia and how deeply the audience seeks to feel that emotion. The new narratives, placed in a familiar and already beloved setting, become the venue for the collision of traditional features with modern requirements. And within these, we see how iconic characters and archetypes evolve over time. The character and charisma of Captain Kirk has been reiterated time and time again. As a truly iconic character, Kirk is expected to retain certain aspects of his personality, draw them out on progressively larger stages, and remain as a mostly static character, trotted back out onto the screen every few years to renew his popularity as a dashing and attractive character. However, that is clearly not possible from a rhetorical standpoint. As cultures evolve and older values adjust to modern values, certain aspects of beloved characters may no longer be valued by the cultures that are consuming the content fed to them by mass media. By watching how the mythology of the *Star Trek* universe expands, it is easy enough to see how society has started to modernize mythology and iconic characters to make them fit into a society that has changed over time. *Star Trek* is a prime example of how narratives incorporate older pieces of themselves, and how narratives can become their own self-contained myths over a period of time in popular culture.

In an effort to prove the extent of the roots of classical myth in texts that influence both elite and popular culture, Arthur Berger developed his "myth model" which explores the various conditions that may be met by specific texts and lie beneath the surface of many common practices. Berger defines a myth as "a sacred narrative that validates cultural beliefs and practices," and follows this up by determining the psychoanalytic reflections, historical

manifestations, elite culture, and the mass-mediated or popular culture of the myth, as well as the myth as it appears in everyday life (Berger, 2013, p. 14). To further explain these conditions, it is necessary to acknowledge that there may be myths that do not fit every aspect of his model, even though they follow the formula of myth, because of the evolving traditions of stories in popular culture. His model serves as a vehicle to explore the rhetorical observations of how myths underlie the current literature and media and how that current literature is influenced by historical events and myths. The model comes into play to show the social aspect of how humans as a culture create or frame narratives as an extension of classical myths and how the new material is actually a reworking of classical traditions. Below is a chart exploring three modern narratives in the context of Berger's model.

Berger's Myth Model	*Harry Potter*	*Star Trek*	*Zelda*
Myth/Sacred Story	General Greek mythology, Arthurian legends	Odysseus	Perseus & Andromeda, George & the Dragon
Psychoanalytic Manifestation	Death	Ego/God complex	Princess Complex: the heroic rescuer
Historical Experience	WWII, Hitler as Voldemort	US/Russia Space Race	European royalty and court culture
Elite Culture	Theatre (Cursed Child)	Novelizations, conventions	Video games, novelizations

Popular Culture	Movies, merchandise (wands, games, books), fanfiction, theme park	Science-fiction to science-reality, fanfiction, Movies, TV shows	New games, platforms, merchandise.
Everyday Life	Mother-child love, chosen family v. biological family	Leadership roles focused on individuals	Traditional gender roles, good guy gets the girl

Berger's model is ideal to explore modern literature and media where very specific myths are addressed with modern culture pieces, but it addresses this in vague terms. Modern pieces, such as *Harry Potter* and *Star Trek*, focus on modern morals, adjusting as cultures grow and evolve, but it is easy to see how contemporary narratives still adhere to traditional values, and their innovative changes and stories occur at a much slower rate as cultures adjust.

A notable addition to Berger's chart, in the "Popular Culture" section, is fanfiction. Fanfiction, a more contemporary form of pastiche writing, started with *Star Trek* in its early years. Today fanfiction is a significant body of fan-made work that exists mostly online and supplies audiences with alternative content on canonic works, such as the *Harry Potter*, *Star Wars*, *Hunger Games*, and *Twilight* series among many. Fanfiction, while transformative enough to avoid copyright violations, retains certain aspects of the canons it expands and thus shows just how deep the roots of myth go. Fanfiction supplies content where there is none, most frequently to feature content different from the canon, and there is no shortage of material to adapt to suit the wants of writers and audiences on the internet. *Harry Potter* fanfiction may feature Harry having a happy childhood rather than a depressing one, while *Star Trek* fanfiction most popularly features a happy union between Kirk and his second officer. This transformative work is an

extension of mythopoesis—audiences supplement limited content with their own. This form of popular culture not only modernizes myths with existing heroes and plots but also pushes the social boundaries of cultures and narratives. With broader focuses on topics like same-sex relationships, diversity, and empowerment, these stories still maintain a connection to the narrative they are adapting. There is a focus on subverting the norms to create a narrative that more broadly encompasses changing social values and behaviors.

Fanfiction shows that mythopoesis is an ongoing participatory activity that is possible because narrative elements are already provided for fanfiction authors in the existing lore. Lore is a function of world-building in that it produces the background setting, a series of known values that quantify a narrative. Lore is the knowledge and the narrative that exists before the start of the book, movie, or game. It explains why certain things are true in the background of the narrative—why traditions are traditions, why certain parties are fighting others, why a society holds certain values, etc.. Lore is pre-built into the foundations before the audience even gets a crack at the material, but new narratives that come from fanfiction are a way for interested parties to increase their own involvement in the context of the narrative. Meanwhile, within the realm of games, lore is used to give the audience a sense of need—in order to successfully complete the game, players must acknowledge the lore and how it creates the narrative.

Games, especially video games are a growing industry as an alternative entertainment source, and the various mediums they control (from tabletop to computers, game consoles, even cell phones) are diverse avenues for a narrative to fold out and incorporate mythic qualities within the completion of set tasks. Games themselves are unique because of their ability to draw the player into the narrative, creating an interactive platform—especially in the case of first-person games. Instead of just reading about a character going through their relatively private

journey in a novel, or watching the portrayal of an actor going through the motions on a large

screen, players are invited into the narrative to perform the journey as the hero. Creating the

narrative of interaction between player and protagonist is one of the more interesting challenges

of the creation of gaming systems.

One of the most interactive forms of storytelling that myths have given way to in the past

few decades is tabletop roleplaying. Combining the art of verbal storytelling and the acting skills

of the players, a very specific game evolved to continue the tradition of heroism and

adventuring—"Dungeons and Dragons," first created by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson in 1974

(M., B., 2007, p. 2). Popularized recently in the form of shows and podcasts like "Critical Role"

and "The Adventure Zone," D&D is a fully-interactive version of the hero's journey, guided by

the storyteller and explored by the players. This is a fascinating remake of traditions, remaining

at once the same and wildly different. D&D varies with every campaign, guide, and roll of a

die—the interactive form of storytelling elevates mythic features into a modern, engaging game.

The stories told through D&D all follow the tradition of the hero's journey, and do it well,

spreading tasks and battles across three or more heroes, each with their own backstory, goals,

and motivations, shared by a life-changing journey—the truest homage to the traditional forms of

myths. D&D is viewed as a pure form of storytelling because the game itself relies on a narrative

for players to follow through. These narratives involve completing quests, battling monsters,

journeying away from home, and saving the world—the epitome of the mythic hero's journey.

The most telling factor of D&D is that it is, at its heart, collaborative storytelling. The narrative

builds from the relationships between the characters and the players, the game-runner and the

players, and the story itself. D&D is a form of cultural consciousness because the narrative is

shared and worked through in a unique form, as it is a roleplaying game. Players act out the story

through dice rolls and imaginative solutions, creating a myth based on planned encounters and chance. The narrative follows the formula of the hero's journey because it has to—a story without tension or conflict dies quickly and is not remembered. From the departure from home to the battles against god figures, D&D creates a unique space for a hero's narrative to thrive in a group-gaming setting.

D&D is not the only form of gaming that incorporates the features of the hero's journey. Some video games also frame themselves on the premise of players accomplishing tasks, defeating villains, and saving the world (or maybe just a princess). One of the most successful franchises is the "Legend of Zelda" game series. Comprising over 20 video games across three gaming platforms (and another on the way) (Nintendo, n.p.), each game is set within the same universe and features a young male protagonist on various difficult quests. The lore of the universe is built upon with each subsequent iteration, building up a mythology that is alive and well in the gaming community that centers around, in this case, the same character. Link, as a young boy in the kingdom of Hyrule, sets out on an adventure, often with the goal of rescuing or completing a task for Princess Zelda, the namesake of the game. Link's journey involves him leaving home and facing various obstacles along his quest. Video games of this nature differ from the established narrative of novels and cinema in that they often involve overcoming a series of villains, known as bosses, in order to reach the final boss and complete the game. "Legend of Zelda" combines "free-roaming exploration, questing, combat, puzzle-solving, and light role-playing elements" (Wolf, 2012, p.360) into a gameplay that offers the player the opportunity to adventure as Link, removing physical danger and placing the hardships of the journey on a separate avatar. Included within the basic narrative of every game are provisions for side-quests, which take the player away from the main narrative. These side quests are actually a

vital aspect of the video game narrative, in that they allow the player to explore the universe of the video game and interact with the other people within the game (NPCs, or non-player characters) and in doing so learn more about the universe of the video game. With these especially prevalent in the Zelda games, where side quests are often inextricably related to the main narrative, and involve gathering magical objects that will eventually be used to complete the main quest, it is easier to connect them to the main line of the story. In exploring the immersive experience of video games, the narrative form of the player's actions becomes increasingly visible within their interactions with NPC's. Often players are limited to only a few courses of action when interacting with these computer-generated characters, and their final choice is influenced by what the player wishes to gain from those interactions. This adds another level to the video game narrative, where the player experiences the journey and is the active participant.

The people who play these video games are placed into the role of Link and set off on their own journey, growing and changing along with the young adventurer. However, Link is a silent character. There is no dialogue written for him, only for those he interacts with. This removes a certain aspect of choice from the player, and the tradition of classical rhetoric as an orally-based persuasive technique but also removes a burden of gameplay that is otherwise fairly common, and introduces the concept of video games as a form of visual rhetoric, relying on the screen to communicate between player and avatar. Despite Link's lack of voice, players are fully engaged with traveling across the virtual landscape and defeating the enemy to rescue the beautiful princess, substituting the virtual game for a physical experience. The images on the screen substitute for wordy descriptions, and Link's silent observance allows players to pass judgement on and interact with their environment without influence from the developers. The

audience sees themselves in the role of the hero, drawing on archetypal patterns that are deeply rooted in the game mechanics themselves, foregoing dialogue and running the paths of the quests set before them. This form of rhetoric accommodates the drive towards visual media and narratives as extensions of the persuasive rhetoric that emerges from the written word, and is the function of rhetoric in a digital-based form of communication (Bogost, 2008, 125).

This form of game narrative itself is unique in that the player is encouraged to act out the role of the hero, rather than being a passive audience member. Games create an environment where passivity is discouraged and active participation is valued and encouraged, helped along by specifically composed music, intangible reward systems, and often player competition. Players make decisions, take action, and work towards accomplishing a goal through a third-party avatar that is a representation of a hero in a fictional world. By taking the traditional role of the narrative and placing it in the context of the audience completing the journey, it becomes a self-fulfilling journey that gives the player a chance to act as the hero, and gives new depth to the concept of the hero's journey. The role of this is interesting, because the focal point is no longer on the hero, but is on the person behind the hero—in this case, the player. The player becomes the hero by acting out the journey through a virtual avatar, removing the sense of physical danger and immediacy and using the hero as a surrogate for the player to experience the hero's journey without facing physical consequences for their virtual actions.

One of the more intriguing aspects of each modern and classical source mentioned in the preceding section is the fact that each protagonist or hero is a male figure. This is both unremarkable and disconcerting, representative of a lack of positive examples of heroines and their role in the narratives of modern and classical cultures. The female heroine, versus the male hero, receives far less quality attention to detail. Heroines are often used as tools, spent as minor

characters and love interests instead of as heroes in their own right. With the emergence of feminism, the number of heroines has increased—but that does not negate their roles in early mythology. Their role was mainly subverted by men, who, in the Greek case, dominate the very word for hero. A female-specific word for hero may not have appeared until the late fifth century BCE (Lyons, 2014, p.10-11), and this suggests that the gender bias that existed in classical times influenced the very concept of the hero's journey by limiting the role of the heroine's journey. The most famous mythological heroines are not in the same glorious category as the heroes. Often worshipped in conjunction with their male counterparts, the role of the heroine was lessened in the overarching themes of classical mythology. From Hecuba to Hera to Medea, the popular archetypes paint heroines as vindictive, overtly masculine, and antagonistic. In more modern contexts, these women would not be considered traditional heroines. Modern narratives place heroines in a category that is mostly equal to that of the hero. They have their own novels, movies, poems; but, there is still a classic trope, exploiting women as weaker members of the human race. Lyons suggests that "more commonly the heroine is invoked as a paradigm of passive suffering" (2014, p. 40) in classical myths, and that is still visible in modern tales. Women are used as plot devices, abandoned in or taken to strange places in order to tempt the "main" hero into rescuing them.

Heroines were celebrated in classical myths because they are symbols of the transitions that take place in their narratives. Girls transition into women, women assume the roles of heroes and then set down their duty, the restored women transition into mothers, and thus their role is spent. The role of mother defines many, many women in myth, as they serve as more of a guide for the hero of a given myth rather than a character in their own right. This conception of women and of heroines speaks to larger cultural values of that time, but modern narratives are bucking

that yoke in favor of introducing more dynamic heroines. With a growing diversity in the market, it is easier to find narratives that center around the female experience and the heroine. However, there is still a lack of true, unbiased representation.

The heroine is a growing market in modern literature and media, but it is still a common feature to find females allowed to be heroes only if they are accompanied or overshadowed by a male. When women do pop up in modern narratives, they are often still restricted by the biases of those classical narratives. Because of the growing appeal to have more representative narratives that push a more united rhetoric, heroines are playing a more important role in modern media—contrasting their earlier role in mythology as the background figure. This shift is clearly seen in the *Harry Potter* novels. Even though the main character is the namesake of the series, his bumbling heroism is accompanied by the virtue of his friends, including the notable example of Hermione Granger. Hermione is infinitely more competent than either of the boys she generally accompanies. On her own, Hermione would be a formidable heroine, but she is relegated to the background despite her significant knowledge and skill with magic. Hermione is an inspiring character to readers, especially female readers, because of her intellectual strength and compassion for others (Garcia, 2012, p. 221). The contemporary aspect of these stories assures that women and girls are viewed in a more favorable light, but there is still hesitation before they are declared valid heroes.

More recently, there has been a trend of strong heroines emerging at the forefront of hero narratives from a position of strength as well as intelligence. Wonder Woman, or Diana of Themyscira, is a prime example of changing cultural relevance and importance. Her role as a hero, most recently in a major blockbuster film, has helped expand the culture of visibility for women to perform as heroes. Wonder Woman is herself of mythic origins—the child of an

Amazon and Ares, Diana is a god-adjacent figure. This helps place her firmly in the realm of classical mythology, manipulated to create a neo-classical heroine. Both an example of strength and a womanly figure, Diana is a step forward for heroines in narratives. Her position as a superhero is constantly underlined by her womanhood, expressed by her dress, her culture, and the direction of her affections. These strong heroines are a mirror of growing gender equality in cultures, and are a positive sign of change. Because heroines are expected to perform at a higher level of excellence compared to their male counterparts, this encourages a deeper look at the cultural context each heroine is placed in. In modern cultures, women are increasingly allowed to perform at higher levels of society as heroes, but in ancient and classical cultures, this was a much less common feat.

Women serving as background heroines echoes back to classical mythology. Women are subservient to men, even as goddesses, and are generally not the focus of their own stories. Myths focus on more masculine perspectives, as the records we have are most commonly told from the point of view of a male figure. Limited literature features classical women as a main character unless that woman's role is as a damsel in distress, a villain, or both. The foremost example of this would be that of Medusa. Once a priestess of Athena, Medusa was forced to suffer the fate of becoming a Gorgon with a terrible visage because she was raped by Poseidon in Athena's temple. As both a symbol of feminine wrath and of loss, Medusa is an example of the tragic fates that often befell women in classical mythology. Her death at the hands of Perseus was an end to her tragic life, and was merely a footnote in Perseus's own story, just another deadly evil to be defeated to complete a male hero's quest. Comparing Medusa's story to that of Wonder Woman is interesting in its juxtaposition. Medusa's fate and cursed appearance were a punishment handed down from a traditionally just god, Athena, where Wonder Woman's

existence is a gift from a violent god, Ares. Medusa's end is tragic—Wonder Woman has no end (to date), and her fate is that of a savior. The growing evolution of women being allowed to take their place at the forefront of a narrative is a hopeful example of the evolution of cultural consciousness, moving away from the bias of earlier cultural narratives.

There is an evolution of cultural consciousness as we see modern iterations of ancient myth gain traction in popular culture. These modern iterations—movies, video games, tabletop games, and more—are shared across cultural boundaries, spreading different myths and cultural identities across permeable boundaries. As these narratives are shared, they evolve to encompass changing values and cultural norms. This is where modern iterations show their cultural relevance according to updated cultural expectations, with backlash against sexist and racist narratives that come to be seen as backwards ideas. With the surge in popularity of retellings, which reshape folk tales, myths, and more, there is an added expectation of transformation. Narratives are adjusted to fit the elevated cultural consciousness, which has spread to encompass cultures across the globe because of how interconnected they are, and thus generate a sense of connectivity. Myths are a major tool for us to generate understanding with each other, and are the tools by which we tell each other who we are across cultures.

Chapter 3: Cross-Cultural Relevance

Myths are growing commonalities across every single form of culture through the ages. They are the purest form of shared consciousness—students across the world are taught myths from the earliest known ages of man, shared through historical objects like the tablets upon which the "Epic of Gilgamesh" is inscribed, and consistently studied and analyzed. Cultural identities rest upon the myths of that culture, and are consistent even across cultures just as myths are. The commonalities range from recurring themes—like the great flood seen in the "Epic of Gilgamesh" as well as the Christian Bible—to similar characters, seen across the countless pantheons of gods and the endless hosts of heroes-turned demigods. Each similarity is another peg in the board for a sense of cross-cultural consciousness and relevance, focused on how cultures express their understanding of the world and their space within it and provide a space in modern narratives for cultural identity. This connectivity allows for cultures that share their values across the boundaries that limit them (language, ideology, religion, etc.) and generates a shared sense of community when audiences connect the similarities between the variety of narratives.

In this way, myths become the basis for a cultural identity that can be quantifiably shared with others. Cultures draw their values, morals, and modern stories from myths, and this guides how the culture evolves in a more condensed time period. When cultures mythologize the recent past, the result is a myth in the shape of the classical, but with modern moral lessons, and crossing the boundaries of cultures with these "myths" is easy. Cultures evolved borrowing from each other—one can find similar deities, events, and beliefs across cultural boundaries and divides. The myths loosely linking these cultures resonate across language and belief barriers, creating a sense of solidarity. The practice of this mutual borrowing runs across ancient myth and across modern media and literature. Based on myth, cultures value certain animals, certain gods,

certain morals in their heroes. These trends can be tracked through those cultures and across

cultural lines as well. Indigenous populations often place a high importance on local flora and

fauna. Religious cultures venerate the hero as a mythic higher power. Cultures as a whole secure

their values in the process of building on the foundations laid down by myths, and the variety of

pure ethos-based messages becomes ingrained in the storytelling tradition of the cultures.

Whether the tradition is based in how the narrative is told—oral storytelling, written language,

visual formats—or in what the narrative is based in—reality, mythical lands, different planets—

there is a consistent reliance on the cultural context and what the narrative is borrowing from

said context. In that, specific cultures are analyzed according to what forms of myth dominate

the culture, and how that spreads through other cultures as a form of cross-cultural

consciousness.

White America is a prime example of an inherited dominant culture. Abstract ideas like

capitalism, prejudice, and divisiveness use myths as tools, and is the dominant culture uses them

to justify their past actions—colonialism and expansion at the cost of non-white lives and

cultures. The "American" culture was built on various legends that were created out of real

people but incorporated mythic values and ideas—Honest Abe and George Washington are the

foremost examples here. These legends arose out of the need to venerate the beginnings of a

culture of white-led idealists in a culture that is dominated by Anglo-Saxon views (Miller, 1981,

p. 34). Claude Levi-Strauss has postulated that history and mythology have become conflated in

modern times as societies begin to view history as a continuation of mythology, where history

serves in the same capacity of myths in how they are used to establish a closer connection to the

mythic qualities of heroes that are still valued in society (Lévi-Strauss, 1995, 42-43). Cultures

around the world exhibit these tendencies on some scale in their media and literature, because

they appeal to the audience at a basic, emotional level. This extends further, applying the aspects of cultures that are growing and studying and learning newer and stranger ways to adapt to technologies within and outside of the culture. When a character is exposed to radioactivity in an American comic book—see Spiderman, Fantastic Four, etc.—they become strong, capable of previously impossible feats, and a hero. In Japan, radioactivity leads to humongous, destructive monsters—see Godzilla, Mothra, etc.. This difference stems from the mythologizing of the past—where America has benefitted from radioactive technology and experiments and continues to draw inspiration from them, Japan has suffered by them, and their narratives continue to showcase the negative consequences they experienced. The recurring theme in modern myth is that it is drawn from the past—and this includes the more recent past. Modern iterations of myth are the tools that people use to explain the past and to explore the ramifications of cultural change.

Through this lens, cultures can perceive relatively recent history with impactful and recognizable mythic qualities. The slowly evolving sense of a cultural identity can be paired with the sense of growing community. With the rise of the Internet, and thus the sense of global connection, the distance between cultures and cultural phenomena is disappearing. Where we saw this in Greek and Roman civilizations, we see it on a larger scale now. Greek civilization drew heavily from Persian society (including their myths). In turn, Roman civilization was heavily influenced by Greek society and so on, until we see the blending of cultural history that occurs today. The sense of a communal consciousness is easier to access because of shared information and media. Cultures from the past have been melded together by the curved lens of history and the narratives that have been recovered, but the bias presented by this changed context is clearly evident. Roman and Greek culture are easily conflated in the earlier levels of

education, and recreating their boundaries at later levels is an arduous task. The commonalities in myths across culture shows how similar cultures can be, seen in how Greek and Roman myth in the naming conventions of their chosen gods (and how modern cultures use them interchangeably). While myths may differ in language and details, they exhibit similar content and characters across cultures, and have the same value in their contexts. As a shared commodity, myths cross the boundaries of countries and language barriers, and the concept of the hero grows.

One of the increasingly normalized techniques of myth in modern literature is magical realism, which combines existing reality and magical or supernatural elements (Aldea, 2011, p.1). Originally an important feature of Latin American literature and still featured prominently in their culture, magical realism has since been co-opted into the larger post-colonial world (Hart & Ouyang, 2005, p.1). Magical realism is a type of story or art that uses existing reality as a base for the setting, but contains or reveals magical elements that have been added for story effect or written as truth. The magical elements are certain parts of the culture's perspective, and are shared across boundaries when these narratives are translated, adopted, and discussed. While not an ideal form of shared culture, the original and adapted forms of magical realism combine mythic features with local legends and imagery to represent cultures that have been disrupted by the colonial narrative, to share their cultures and cultural narratives across national and linguistic borders (Zamora and Faris, 1995, p.2). This particular narrative form is especially suited to testing the boundaries of cultural limits, and facilitates combining worlds, spaces, and systems that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction (Zamora and Faris, 1995, p.6). Magical realism is a unique form of literature that encompasses an actual way of life for many people. At its essence, it is bringing elements of the mythic into the daily life of a people, and the appeal of

this form of belief and narrative comes from its connections to traditions. By bringing the supernatural into everyday culture (or fiction) this form of belief is accepted and integrated across cultures. However, systems of "otherness" in the form of magical realism resist complete colonization, and are thus difficult to quantify in a larger context. Aspects of magical realism persist in modern genre fiction across cultural narratives, but the lens of those modern genres denies the essence of the cultural basis. The Latin American origins are largely buried under colonialist narratives that privilege Western cultural norms over "otherness."

"Otherness" is a crossing of boundaries and a sign of the magical qualities in a narrative that stands off from the realism of the narrative world (Aldea, 2011, p.86). Narratives that share the stories of "otherness" help cultures learn about and come to terms with the various differences that come from having such a diverse range of cultures across the globe, and help others learn about and come to terms with this form of diversity. For example, magical realism takes on the burden of the post-colonial narrative because of the parallels that can be drawn culturally from the effects that colonization had on specifically Latin American cultures, and on wider cultures as a whole. This sense of "otherness" also extends to the hero of each narrative, whose journey takes place in the constraints of their cultural contexts and boundaries. Crossing cultural boundaries, the hero in these narratives adheres to the stricter forms of their mythic origins. With a seamless integration of magic into the tale, magical realism restores the sense of widespread magical traditions and mythical or supernatural aspects that, in turn, affect how the hero reacts to and uses their environment. Accepting and integrating these mythic aspects into the tale means modern narratives share an even deeper connection to their classical origins, especially according to how heroes can affect their narrative. Latin American narratives that incorporate this piece of the culture, therefore, are the closest narratives to the epic traditions of

past narratives where heroes are often able to make use of supernatural or mythic abilities within themselves to conquer the problem, whereas narratives that focus on concepts like the inherent dominant culture of America create narratives where the heroes are influenced by outside forces and receive their abilities from outside of themselves.

Heroes across cultures fulfill the steps of the hero's journey, and they do so especially well in cultures steeped in magical realism. They leave home, conquer obstacles, defeat their enemy, and return home as changed members of society, and each step is tinged with an underlying devotion to supporting a world that is as magical as any fantasy novel. Their influence is affected by how their narrative utilizes the resources available: magical realism narratives focus on how the hero has conquered a piece of themselves and subjugated a mythic element within themselves as well as the more traditional outer threats. A magical-realist's approach to the sense of self is rooted in an identity that is inseparable from their culture. The magic that is incorporated is a piece of that identity, and guides the narrative conventions that follow, rather than it having to be justified by an external reason. The cultural context is already present, gifting its inhabitants with an authentic cultural identity that resists the effects of colonialism. More Western narratives focus on how the hero has conquered a foe outside of themselves, and subjugated a wider element or enemy. The hero as a whole is affected by the cultural context of their narrative more than they are by the genre their story is categorized in, told in a different voice that lends itself to increasingly diverse perspectives. The hero, therefore, is a product of context and that sense of cross-cultural relevance that influences the final narrative comes from the creators. Throughout the forms of magical realism or inherited mythos, myth and mythic structures are consistently shared and adjusted minutely by the perspectives of their creators. When compared to the more recent Americanized standards of narratives, it

becomes clear that these narratives—narratives created by and for cultures in themselves—are a result of an indigenous shared consciousness that is separate from the colonialist perspective. The nature of the narrative is so deeply embedded in cultural respects that the traditions are emerging from their cultures as society moves to embrace individuality even as there is a global movement towards unification and diversity at the same time.

The voices that shape the perspective inform the context and adjust the narrative to each specific culture are "own voices," or narratives written from the perspective of someone who is in the same diverse group as the hero. This concept was first introduced on Twitter by Corinne Duyvis, who suggested that giving a name to narratives that fulfilled a specific niche desire in the kid's literature (kidlit) world should be given a specific category (Duyvis, 2015, Tweet). The tweet started a publishing-Twitter movement of uplifting "own voices" and their narratives, and sharing those narratives across cultural boundaries in order to promote their value as culturally accurate stories (Duyvis, 2015, FAQ). Sharing these voices across cultures helps increase the variety of available perspectives and narratives, but still retains the original forms of the story and of the hero. Each hero's journey is similar because they follow the same steps, no matter what culture their narrative emerges from, but also gain a unique perspective that is relatable and familiar, and therefore easily consumable. The concept of "own voices" is a category in which diverse narratives can flourish across cultural boundaries and enhance diversity. With the current trend towards fully accepting and empowering diversity across genres and cultural boundaries, "own voices" are an increasingly important aspect of any narrative, and a valuable tool to educate the audience about specific aspects of the hero and the hero's journey in different cultural contexts.

The concept of cross-cultural consciousness has been expanded by the growing availability of the Internet and translated fiction, and thus there has been an accompanying analysis of magical realism and "own voices". In conjunction with the inherited dominant cultural context, myths and their cultural relevance are elevated to a cross-cultural level, and initiate modern sharing practices. This mirrors older cultures in a more specific way—instead of interacting with conquered cultures and assimilating those cultures into the dominant, there is a visible effort to preserve and protect individual narratives and promote their diversity without destroying or appropriating that culture. Meanwhile, the sense of relevance across cultural boundaries has been influenced by the open connections between countries and cultures. With the rise of easier forms of international communication in a post-colonial world market it is easier to explore the influence of myths inside and outside of their native culture and environment.

Conclusion:

Myths are the basic tools that help cultures generate understanding with each other, through the forms of the classic hero and their journey, and how they convey cultural qualities and expectations. Myths are how cultures can relate to each other, despite different values and needs, because they are the easiest medium by which to tell the stories that mean the most to each individual culture. Readers relate to heroes because of their human qualities, while cultures relate to myths as a whole because of their details. The hero's journey matters immensely to every narrative and every culture. It has inherent value as a literary tool because the context surrounding the journey is supposed to detail the surroundings as a surrogate for the culture. When cultural narratives cross cultural boundaries, they celebrate their original cultural context by sharing it. The hero's journey has evolved from a simple literary tool into a cross-cultural touchstone that shapes narratives into familiar works of cultural significance across new media, incorporating new values. As the modern iterations spread through movie theaters and gaming platforms, myths transform into connections that link cultures across language and belief barriers, encouraging cross-cultural connection in a way that supports myth itself.

Myths rely on the tendency to reuse this narrative in order to create content that is new, yet still culturally relevant. This transmutation of myth helps shape and transform how myths are used as cultural artifacts and read in specific contexts. The hero's journey plays its main role here, where the narrative requires recognizable properties to draw in the reader. The qualities required of a hero differ slightly between cultures, but the qualities required of their journey remain remarkably similar. From the departure to the return, the hero's journey (if not always the hero themselves) attracts readers to the myth and narrative emerging as modern artifacts. The adventure, examined here in everything from *Star Trek* to *Harry Potter*, relies on the hero to push past regular concerns and take on an identity that is based more off of an entire culture's

ideals rather than a person. The hero becomes a surrogate for the audience, who is probing the story for relevance in their own life and in the larger cultural context. The stories are still the same, spread across different forms of media, embracing diverse cultures and people. Modern media are myths recast, bringing new perspectives to the fore and reflecting more inclusive attitudes to the audience. With the addition of these transformative modern perspectives, myths become the foundations for modern narratives.

The popularity of modern myths arises from the cultural crossover. The increasing body of works that exist translated into different languages, such as *Harry Potter* and *Star Trek* as well as video games, creates a vast and interconnected network. These new myths serve as the connections between cultures, bridging the gap between appropriation and understanding. The new examples of myth in movies, games, and books are rooted deeply in the past mythology of cultures across the globe. And because of this, they are used to relate cultural values and showcase their ideals to other cultures that consume the same media. As media proliferates through translation, a cross-cultural consciousness forms, and audiences across the globe share a similar experience when they interact with media, whether it's as a passive audience-member or as an active player or writer.

Today, myths are seen as the foundation of modern media, for good reason. Myths provide the foundation that new media iterations are built upon, providing common themes, plots, and archetypal characters that give audiences a tangible context in which to enjoy the modern myths. New narratives showcase more diverse cultures and their impacts. With blockbuster successes such as *Black Panther* and *A Wrinkle in Time*, the movie industry helps to shape progressive social and cultural perspectives. Print publishers are also consciously offering more diverse perspectives with books like *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, which has spent

over a year on the New York Times Bestseller list. Modern narratives are beginning to show just how cultures have grown and changed, and as modern cultures develop and evolve further, so does modern mythology. From the hero's journey to the cultural ideals that permeate each myth, modern mythology is both familiar and transformative, and produces an authentic view of cultures across the globe.

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