



**The First Annual Summer Symposium**  
*Forgotten Artistry: Teacher Savvy and Creative Classrooms*

**Archetypes & Symbols**

**Part I: Archetypal Criticism**

by JJ Botta

## Notes on Slides

### Archetypes & Symbols

By

JJ Botta

### PART I: ARCHETYPAL CRITICISM

This process is a key to  
understanding literature

### Types of Literary Criticism

- Cultural (Sociological)
- Psychological
- Historical
- Traditional (Formalist)

### The Archetypal Approach

- Sir James Frazer
  - Anthropologist
- Carl Jung
  - Psychologist
- Joseph Campbell
  - Author, Mythologist

### The Archetypal Approach

- Literature reflects life
- Life reflects literature
- We are all on a journey
  - We are born
  - We live
  - We die

## Important Definitions

- Myth – An accepted belief
  - Mythology – A group of related myths
  - Symbol – Image that means more than itself
  - Archetype – Original model, pattern, or mold
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## Symbols & Archetypes

### Test Your Knowledge

- What do the following items symbolize?
    - Ring
    - Bread
    - Heart
    - Rainbow
    - Pig
    - Bull
- 

## Symbols & Archetypes

### Some Common Archetypes

- Coming of Age
  - Shadow or Beast
  - Wise Old Man
  - Witch
  - Star-crossed Lovers
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## Symbols & Archetypes

### Test Your Knowledge

List five fairy tales, five books, and five movies containing the following symbols and archetypes:

- Outcast
  - Parent & Child
  - Temptress
  - Loss of Innocence
  - Forest
- 

## Summary

### Archetypal Criticism:

- Based on Human Life Cycle
    - We are born
    - We live
    - We die
  - Uses Symbols & Archetypes from Common Myths to Send Messages to Readers
  - Identifying Symbols & Archetypes enhances our understanding of novels.
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## **Archetypes & Symbols – Part I**

### **List of Common Symbols:**

Light – hope, renewal, intellectual illumination

Darkness – the unknown, ignorance, despair

Water – life, birth, spiritual birth, baptism

Heaven – the sky, mountaintops

Hell – bowels of the earth

Fire – knowledge, light, life, rebirth

Ice – ignorance, darkness, sterility, death

Cross – Tree of life, struggle, martyrdom

Circle – unity, sun, eternity, perfection

Air – freedom, light, creativity

Ascent – transcendence, inward journey, increasing intensity, heaven

Center – thought, unity, timelessness, infinity, paradise

Descent – unconscious, animal nature, hell

Lake – mystery, death, unconscious

Forest – evil, lost, fear

Valley – depression, evil, unknown

Sun – hero, knowledge, life force, awakening, healing, resurrection

## **Colors**

Black – darkness, chaos, mystery, the unknown, death, evil

Red – blood, sacrifice, disorder, fire, emotion, death, anger, heat, passion

Green – hope, jealousy, envy, Earth, fertility, vegetation, growth, nature

White – purity, peace, innocence, goodness, morality, Spirit, spiritual thought

Orange – fire, pride, ambition

Blue – sea, sky, height, depth, heaven, truth, spirituality, religious feeling

Violet – water, nostalgia, memory, advanced spirituality

Gold – Majesty, sun, wealth, truth

Silver - wealth

## **Numbers**

Three – Trinity, mind, body, spirit, birth, life, death

Four – Mankind (four limbs), four elements, four seasons

Six – devil, evil

Seven – deadly sins, creation, days of week, colors of rainbow

## **List of Common Archetypes:**

Coming of Age – a young person's transition from childhood to adulthood.

Shadow or Beast – the dark side of one's personality. It represents whatever we are afraid of in our own personalities.

Trickster – a clown, mocking oneself, who surprises, disrupts human plans, and serves as a bridge between a hero and the transformation. This is a psychological archetype, exposing hypocrisy.

Virgin – innocence, purity, freshness, naiveté

Wise Old Man – wisdom figure, giving knowledge, as a higher self or authority figure. He might be a wizard, sage, king, father, grandfather, savior, redeemer, or guru. He represents knowledge, insight, wisdom, intuition, and morality. He guides a hero toward enlightenment.

Wise Old Woman – loving and wise aspect of the Self. Witch, Grandmother, mother, or queen.

Witch – wild woman with destructive power necessary for rebirth or regeneration.

Wizard – represents a connection with the controlling forces of nature.

Magician – represents the ability to do things, good or evil, that the rest of humanity cannot do.

Outcast – cast out of society, or leaves voluntarily. Christ figure.

Scapegoat – guilty or not, he is blamed for everything.

Star-crossed lovers – young couple, joined by love, but parted by fate.

Shrew – nagging, verbally abusive wife.

Lost Soul – tormented being, living in solitude.

Cave – symbol of the womb. Entrance to Mother Earth and passage to the underworld (unconscious) into which the hero goes to begin the process of individuation. It is the place from which the reborn, regenerated, hero emerges, with wisdom, after transformation.

Forest – archetypal symbol of the unconscious. Mysterious, secretive place of fertility and growth, where heroes and heroines enter, alone, so individuation might take place.

Garden – A feminine archetype. A place of balance and harmony, paradise, yin and yang, innocence, unspoiled beauty.

House – The Self. Rooms and different levels represent the different aspects of the self.

Loss of Innocence – losing one's innocence through sexual experience, violence, or other means.

Rite of Passage – physical and psychological journeys of self-discovery.

Parent and Child – these literary prototypes mirror the real-life relationships between mothers and daughters and fathers and sons.

Mother Archetype – represents the universal, prototypical, literary mother character, who can be positive or negative, a giver of life or giver of death, depending on the perspective of the author.

Child Archetype – symbolizes innocence. Inexperienced, never seeing reality behind the outward disguises of the images they encounter in life.

Temptress – negative female forces impeding a hero's quest to attain his goal or treasure.

Hero – the Self on its journey to achieve full potential.

## Introduction



We are all on a journey through life. Very simplistically, we are born, we live our lives, and we die. While human beings celebrate life in a variety of ways, there are similar experiences we share as a species on this planet. The search for these similarities makes the study of archetypes so interesting.

Babies are born with certain qualities that nature alone provides. Human beings differ in genetic makeup, cultures, races, physical appearances, and abilities. Some of us struggle at tasks others find simple. Our senses of humor are as different as our taste buds. We are not all the same person, but we are the same evolving species. As such, many of life's experiences will be difficult, and others easy. It might depend on perspective as much as anything else. The human approach to any situation presented in life depends a great deal on the individual having the experience. Nevertheless, we all experience things in life. This is how we learn.

It is impossible for human beings to imagine new concepts without some correlation to their experiences in life. As human beings, we experience things personally, we learn things from others, or we imagine things (But even what we imagine is still connected to reality). The same pattern holds true in literature. For an author to write a story, that author must relate personal experiences, experiences had by others, or imagined experiences. This is so because authors are human.

What all this means is that literature records the human experience. If we were to read everything ever written, we would most likely discover the sum total of the collective human experience since the beginning of life on Earth. Everything human beings can know or imagine is contained in books - or it has not yet been known, imagined, or recorded.

Every day, writers of literature attempt to find the factual data or the imagined concept about which no other author has ever written. Rarely, an author is successful, and we praise the effort. More often than not, people write about their individual perceptions of similar experiences had by others. A story about catching a shark is similar to someone else's story about catching a barracuda, or a bigger shark, or a different fish, or a rabid raccoon. It is not the same. It is similar. We do not all live the same life, but we all live our lives. The method of literary analysis known as *Archetypal Criticism* searches

literature for similar experiences. Mastering this method opens the doors to a new understanding of experiences written about in books and memorialized in film.

## **The Archetypal Approach**



This summary is intended to be a jumping off point for the person seeking to embark on the journey of a lifetime through literature or film - with confidence. To accomplish this goal, let us first discuss some mythological background to lay the foundation for this analytical technique.

By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the word *myth* had become synonymous with fiction or falsity, and the definition became cemented into the minds of readers and moviegoers for the next hundred years. Unfortunately, with the popularity of the new meaning, we lost the traditional one altogether.

In reality, a myth is a philosophical rule or belief that gives meaning to people's lives. Myths are ideas emanating from the experiences of many human beings. These ideas evolve into beliefs accepted by social groups, until they become controlling. When one series of myths is connected to another, they form a *Mythology*, or rules governing the way human beings live. Religion, for example, might be considered a mythology. This does not imply that any particular religious beliefs are false - or true. It only indicates that they are beliefs that groups of human beings adhere to philosophically. Religion does exist. This is reality.

Similarly, when we watch movies on the big screen, we witness the likes, fears, dreams, and goals of human beings, even if we do not share those feelings. We discover the viewpoints of others who share common life situations. We become privy to a world outside of our personal sphere of experience. Movies and books use mythology to demonstrate the thinking of others, or the universal language of human beliefs, true and false, speculative and scientific.

Archetypes are molds. They are enduring, common, recurring patterns of human behavior that repeat themselves, and have done so since primitive times. Take, for

example, the concept of *coming-of-age*. Literary and film characters grow up. The happening that causes them to enter their rite of passage might be pleasant, rewarding, challenging, traumatic, tragic, or otherwise extraordinary. Characters might grow up by themselves, or with the help of a mentor. They might be lost at sea, in outer space, or in a cave. The archetype is the coming of age. The process of becoming an adult does not differ, whether it happens in Ancient Rome, during the American Revolution, or in high school in 2012. While the *how* might change from story to story, the *fact* that young people grow up never varies. The secret to enhancing our enjoyment of books and movies lies in our ability to spot those commonalities. It helps us understand what we are watching or reading.

### **The Narrative Pattern**

The basic idea of studying the narrative patterns of literature and film is to give us some familiarity with the framework that is used by authors and producers when constructing books and films. Once we discover the basic structure, we gain a deeper understanding. Typically, a reader begins the exploration of a book not knowing the direction the author will take him or her. If we are not *entertained*, we conclude the work is lacking in value, or the author failed to write a good book. It is the same with movies. The movie stinks if we do not understand it. The reality might be we do not have enough knowledge about what to look for in order to analyze the book or movie properly.

Literature and films repeat patterns of events that occur in ordinary human life. We know historians always tell us we cannot predict the future. However, they also warn us to examine the past to avoid a recurrence of the not-so-good things that have already happened to others. When we learn to identify the narrative patterns in books and movies, we learn to *expect* them to occur. Sometimes, they unfold as expected. Sometimes, they do not. It is the search for the narrative, or *expected*, pattern that holds our interest and gives us a better understanding of the story presented.



Consider a typical television sitcom. Boy meets girl and they fall in love. Perhaps, boy meets girl, but he is crushed when she rejects him. Girl might have another love, or boy might already be married. Maybe, girl disappears tragically. What if boy seeks the affection of girl, but finds instead the love of another. The possibilities are limitless - or limited only by human imagination. The essential element is the relationship between

boy and girl. Could you imagine spending money on a movie where boy meets girl, and leaves with absolutely nothing happening? Of course not, because human experience follows patterns, and we learn to expect them. Narrative patterns are not the plot. The plot is the form the pattern takes. The pattern itself is a recurring archetype, copied by the imagination of man, and reshaped in every book or movie according to the author or producer's perspective.

## **Displacement**

Obviously, authors must reshape narrative patterns. If they did not, there would only be one story. For example, suppose in tale #1, Billy meets Sally and they fall in love. Now, suppose in tale #2, Bobby meets Susie and they fall in love. What we have is the identical story. Thus, unless the world is to be stuck with one book and one movie, authors and producers must reshape the common, original pattern. This concept is called *displacement*.

*Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Rapunzel*, and *Snow White* all await the prince on his white horse, yet we have four different tales. Are *Zorro* and *Ivanhoe* different because they ride black horses? Are they different from modern firefighters because they enter burning buildings without horses in order to save others? No! The pattern remains the same, while the circumstances change. The surrounding material might differ from book to book or film to film, but the pattern is clearly identifiable, because the myth or belief in the hero remains part of the same human experience in all of us. The story changes, but the archetype is the same.

## **Suggested Reading**

Botta, JJ. *Surviving the Journey: A Universal Approach for the Student Critic*.

Bloomington, IN: 1<sup>st</sup> Books Library, 2003.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Princeton: Princeton

University Press, 1968.

Foster, Thomas C. *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*. New York: Harper, 2003.

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960.

## **About the Presenter**

JJ Botta is a freelance writer and university professor. His resume contains numerous magazine and online publications on a variety of topics. He is the author of ten books in the fields of Writing and the Humanities. His works include:

*Surviving the Journey: A Universal Approach for the Student Critic*

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**Archetypes & Symbols**

**Part II: The Heroic Quest**

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## Notes on Slides

### Archetypes & Symbols

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### PART II: THE HEROIC QUEST PATTERN

This process is a key to  
understanding literature

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### The Archetypal Approach

- Literature reflects life
  - Life reflects literature
  - We are all on a journey
    - We are born
    - We live
    - We die
- 

### Important Definitions

- *Symbol* - Image that means more than itself
- *Archetype* - Original model, pattern, or mold
- *Narrative Pattern* - The expected happening in a story
- *Displacement* - Changing the narrative pattern to change the story

PRACTICE

List a few stories with patterns displaced

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## The Heroic Quest

- This is the most common archetypal pattern found in literature
  - The quest pattern reflects the hero or protagonist's life journey
  - Just as circumstances in our lives are different, the circumstances faced by literary characters are different
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## Heroic Quest Stage I

- Invitation to Adventure
    - Some characteristics of the hero
      - Often unhappy
      - Mundane life
      - Often hidden royalty
      - Stuck in comfort zone
      - Somehow he is called to adventure
      - Sometimes thrust into adventure unwillingly
- 

## Heroic Quest Stage I

- Invitation to Adventure
    - Some characteristics of the Alter Ego
      - Hero's opposite character
      - Embodies the hidden side of the hero
      - Embodies the hero's unseen character traits
      - Meeting signifies the hero's self-awareness
      - Often someone the hero emulates or respects
      - Possesses characteristics the hero wants
      - Possesses characteristics the hero does not want
- 

## Heroic Quest Stage II

- The Ordeal
    - Once the hero accepts the challenge, we expect trouble
    - The struggle could be physical (like nature)
    - The struggle could be psychological (like cowardice)
    - The struggle could be imaginary (like monsters)
-

## Heroic Quest Stage II

- **The Ordeal**
  - Need not be a physical adventure
  - Often a journey of self-discovery
  - Usually a dangerous battle against internal or external enemies
  - Heroic ordeals signify achieving worthy goals in life
  - Just like in real life, heroes have helpers

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## Heroic Quest Stage III

- **The Transformation**
  - After the hero travels on his journey, he is changed forever
  - As in life, the hero is born, lives, and dies
  - Symbolically, the hero always dies
  - As in life, there is a beginning, middle, and end
  - Along the way, the hero searches for some treasure
  - Sometimes, the treasure is valuable only to the hero

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## Trace the Pattern

### It's Time for Practice

Break into groups of two and trace the Heroic Quest Pattern through the following books/movies:

- *The Wizard of OZ*
- *The Lion King*
- *The Hunger Games*

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## Summary

- The *Heroic Quest* is the most common archetype found in literature.
  - As in life, heroes are *Invited to Adventure*. Look for an *Alter Ego*
  - Heroes embark on *Journeys or Ordeals*. Look for *Helpers* along the way.
  - Heroes seek *Treasures*. In the end, they symbolically die. Then, they are reborn with new wisdom acquired on the journey. They are *Transformed*.
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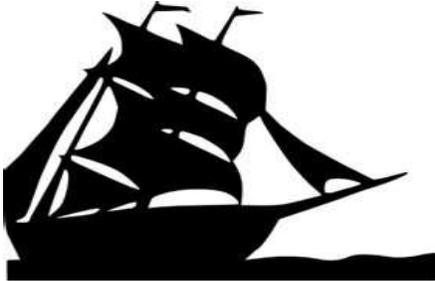
## Archetypes & Symbols – Part II

### The Heroic Quest Pattern:

No single summary can adequately address every pattern, myth, or archetype. However, **the most common archetype appearing in literature and film is that of the heroic quest, or the journey of the hero.**

As stated earlier, we are all on a journey through life. During our journeys, we are born, we live our lives, and we die. The *details* of our journeys differ, because we do not all live the same life. Likewise, in literature and film, the *details* are subject to the perspectives of authors and producers.

Throughout the ages, many stories are told and retold in similar fashion. Some become classics, and some do not. Some are geared for adults, and some for children. Yet, the thread that connects these stories is the archetypal narrative heroic quest pattern that endures time.

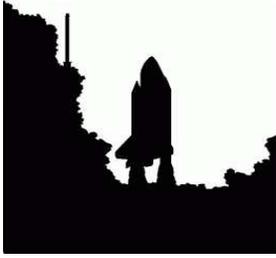


Let us consider Homer's classic heroic epic, *The Odyssey*. In the tale, the hero Odysseus embarks on an adventure as he attempts to return home after the Greek victory in the Trojan War. Now, change gears and follow Little Red Riding Hood on her journey to grandma's house. Many people hesitate to read Homer's classic, but read the children's story frequently. At first glance, the fairy tale appears easier to understand. Nevertheless, the same narrative pattern exists in both tales. The hero must overcome the difficult journey hoping to arrive safely at a home sanctuary. In one story, the heroine faces the dangers in the forest. In the other, the hero faces the dangers on the seas. One protagonist must battle the giant Cyclops, and the other battles the Big Bad Wolf. It is the same story! Just like in real life, only the details have changed.



Next, we will examine in detail the first step in Heroic Quest Pattern.

## Step One: Invitation to Adventure



The idea of reading a book or watching a movie to discover the plot is quite different from spotting the narrative pattern as it unfolds. To illustrate this point, let us begin by writing a book together.

In Chapter 1, an accountant awakens in the morning at 7:00 am to the sound of his alarm. He brushes his teeth, brews some coffee, showers, gets dressed, reads the newspaper, leaves for work at 8:00 am, and drives thirty miles to his office. At noon, after a morning of tax returns, the accountant takes a one-hour lunch break, and then resumes his work on the tax returns all afternoon. At 5:00 pm, he drives the thirty miles home, prepares and eats dinner, watches television, reads the evening paper, and retires to bed, after setting his alarm for 7:00 am.

Chapters 2 through 32 reveal exactly the same scenario. Then, finally, after repeating the same happenings, the last chapter ends as the accountant retires for the evening after setting his alarm for 7:00 am. How long would it take readers to figure out something is missing? I am certain not very long. We wrote a book, but there is no story! We have nothing more than a boring recitation of routine events. Just like in real life, literary characters have different experiences, even though they are born, they live, and they die. They must have unique circumstances in their lives, because literature reflects the story of life.

So let us re-write our novel. This time around, in Chapter 4, just as our accountant is about to fall asleep, the telephone rings. It is the President of the United States. He offers the accountant a job with NASA training to become an astronaut in preparation for the first manned mission to the planet Mars. Now, our protagonist, or hero, has a decision to make. His reply might alter his life. This new *action* scenario is an example of an heroic invitation to adventure. Depending upon the hero's response, the heroic quest might now begin.

Obviously, if our accountant friend hangs up on the President and falls off to sleep, there is no story. On the other hand, if he accepts the challenge, the circumstances of his mundane, ordinary life will change forever. He has accepted the invitation to adventure. The archetypal narrative heroic quest pattern always begins with an invitation to adventure. The invitation is delivered by a *herald*, such as the President in

our tale. The herald might be a sign, a bird, a witch, a spouse, or a photograph. In any event, someone, that is some herald, delivers the message.

### **The Reluctant Hero**



In life, things do not always go the way we plan them. Thus, since books and films are based on reality, literary and movie heroes frequently are thrown curves by their circumstances. Not all heroes happily accept their challenges. Like the nursery school teacher who finds herself alone when the fire breaks out, or the child stranded in the forest when his father falls unconscious, heroes are often thrust into their adventure without formal invitation. They are reluctant heroes.

Let us consider little Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. At no time is she asked to embark on an adventure. In fact, it is just the opposite. In the beginning of the film, this ordinary young girl is crushed when her dog is taken away. She asks for help from her aunt, uncle, farm hands, and even a stranger, all to no avail. They are all too busy to deal with the trials and tribulations of a child. But Mother Nature is a herald of adventure. Reluctantly, little Dorothy is whisked away by a violent tornado to begin her heroic quest.

### **The Alter Ego**



In real life, when we are growing up, our parents look at our friends and acquaintances as a guide to monitoring our actions and our character. It works the same way in literature and film. If the audience wants a glimpse into the good character of the hero, they need only consider the character of the villain.

In all of us, there is a secret side, the persona no one on the outside sees. The person you are in public is not exactly the same person in private. If an author or film producer wishes to exaggerate the concept, the result is *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Just as we must occasionally confront this alter ego, or other side of our personality, fictional characters must also confront their nemeses.

In real life, we want to possess the qualities we do not have. We observe others, and when we see something we admire, we attempt to emulate those traits. We learn from the habits and behavioral patterns of other human beings. As we struggle through life, we observe what others have done differently to solve similar problems.

Part of the fun of reading or movie watching is to identify the *alter ego*. He, she, or it is the opposite of the hero, or the other side of the hero's personality the hero would rather not have exposed. The hero, like all of us, has a hidden personality, chock full of un-admirable traits. The alter ego possesses these private traits of the hero, and openly displays them to the rest of the world, which is something the hero cannot or will not do. Frequently, the hero's inability to display his inner weaknesses prevents him from completing his journey. It is only through the protagonist's discovery or face-to-face recognition of the alter ego's characteristics that the hero looks in the mirror at his own hidden self. This revelation of *Self* motivates the hero to travel the path to which he is called.

Through the discovery of the alter ego, the hero identifies his dark side that has been keeping him in his ordinary, mundane world. The hero's confrontation with his alter ego is a significant stepping-stone toward the successful completion of his journey. Why does the peaceful sheriff have the ability to draw his pistol so quickly? Deep inside, he could be a vicious killer, but remains an ordinary peace officer. His life is mundane, even boring - until the bad-guy gunfighter arrives in town. Ultimately, the ordinary sheriff confronts his alter ego, saves the day, and becomes heroic.

The human journey through life is always psychological. Sometimes, the alter ego resides within us. We might have to battle ourselves to overcome fear, cowardice, or jealousy. There is always something to struggle against in this world. That is life.

Looking back to our accountant friend, something needs to happen to start the action, or there will be no story. Unless the protagonist is sufficiently moved to adventure, pushed into conflict, or faced with a predicament, nothing will be resolved to the reader or moviegoer's satisfaction. In the case of the accountant, the invitation to adventure was the call from the White House. It could have been virtually anything that excited the hero to the extent of intensifying his need to complete the mission or accomplish his goal, despite the inevitable difficulties.

Let us take another look at Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. She does not appear to have the ability to protect her dog, *Toto*, from a mean old woman. She commands no respect

from those around her, who refuse to assist her in her time of trouble. Suddenly, this ordinary little girl is reluctantly swept into an adventure by a tornado. She desperately wants to return home, but cannot seem to muster up the ability. Then, she discovers her alter ego - the Wicked Witch of the West. This character is as cruel and evil as Dorothy is good and kind. If we want to know just how good a person Dorothy is, we need only observe the bad character of the witch as a comparison.

Thus far, we have learned that enhancing our enjoyment of books and movies requires an understanding of a few principles:

1. We look for the herald of the invitation to adventure.
2. We identify the nature of the task facing the hero.
3. We spot the hero's alter ego, which helps us to learn about traits of the hero himself, and his chances of success as he prepares for his journey.

Next, we will examine in detail the second step in Heroic Quest Pattern.

## **The Ordeal**



In literature and film, we do not know exactly what the hero will encounter on his or her journey, but we do know there will be a struggle, and we come to expect it. The ordinary hero will travel the road to the ultimate confrontation with fear. Whether or not it proves to be dangerous is of no consequence. For the hero, the journey is always difficult. Furthermore, while the onlooker readers and moviegoers do not know whether the struggle will be real or imaginary, we do know it will always be psychological.

Does it really matter if the hero slays a great beast, kills a fellow gladiator, rows across the Pacific, or finally learns sign language? No, not at all. Since literature and film reflect life, we do know the hero will always struggle - as we do. Unless the hero answers the Invitation to Adventure and begins the next step on the journey, *The Ordeal*, there is no action.

The ordinary hero might fight the powers of nature, monsters, cowardice, or any other challenge we can imagine. The challenge might come from without or within. Often, it is ironic that the hero is seemingly the person most likely to fail. The *ordinary* person is

a prime subject for heroism in books and movies. That an ordinary human can rise to the occasion defines heroism and makes the journey of life meaningful. Whether the hero dies physically or symbolically, he succeeds. It is important to understand that absent a life-and-death moment, or at least an extremely tense situation, endangering the hero's chances of success, there is no story. Again, remember the accountant? If he accepted the President's challenge and flew to Mars and back without incident, you would never see it on the big screen! There would be no quest. The ordinary hero's attempt to overcome the odds is the literary or film equivalent of a soldier jumping on a grenade to save the rest of the troop.

## Help Along the Way



We all know that real human beings rarely succeed without help. It is the same in books and films. As in real life, movies feature mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, teachers and students, and other archetypal characters that assist heroes and heroines in their quests. The helpers might be real or imaginary, dead or alive, human or animal, or even an inanimate object. However they do appear frequently in films and novels.

Many times, helpers and mentors merely offer suggestions. Just as in real life, heroes do not always heed their advice. That is because they are ordinary heroes, with human frailties. Some helpers assist directly, and some indirectly.

Like most of us, the literary and film hero loses his motivation from time to time. The best of us boldly proclaim resolutions on New Year's Eve, only to abandon our commitments before the end of the month. Thus, even the most motivated protagonist gets discouraged and contemplates ending the quest early. When the odds are stacked against the hero and he is ready to throw in the towel, in walks the archetypal helper to provide the needed encouragement.

Once again, let us look at the literary Dorothy in Frank Baum's novel, or the film version of *The Wizard of Oz* from 1939, as the reluctant heroine enters the second stage of her quest - *The Ordeal*. She must get home, but cannot figure out how to accomplish the task. When all seems lost, she encounters the *Scarecrow*, *Cowardly Lion*, and *Tin Man* to aid the heroine in her efforts to battle the *Wicked Witch* and return home to Kansas.

Thus far, we have learned that enhancing our enjoyment of books and movies requires an understanding of a few principles:

1. We look for the herald of the invitation to adventure.
2. We identify the nature of the task facing the hero.
3. We spot the hero's alter ego, which helps us to learn about traits of the hero himself, as he prepares for his journey.
4. We observe the hero as he embarks upon his quest.
5. We recognize the difficulty facing the hero and assess the chances of success.
6. We identify the helpers that will aid the ordinary hero in his time of need and improve his chances of successfully completing the heroic quest.

Next, we will examine in detail the final step in Heroic Quest Pattern - The Transformation.

## **The Transformation**



As in real life, there is a beginning, middle, and end in film and literature. Following the *Invitation to Adventure* and the *Ordeal* of the hero, the *Transformation* of the ordinary hero from what he was to what he has become completes the beginning, middle, and ending pattern found in film and literature.

Even before tackling the first chapter of a literary classic or watching the first scene of a movie, we know that as sure as human beings begin at birth, live their lives, and die, heroes begin their quests by accepting the call to their adventure. We also know the hero will have some struggle or ordeal to overcome, and sometimes even a series of challenges, most likely dangerous and physical, and always psychological. Otherwise, there is no story.

We also know one more thing about film and book heroes – They always die, at least symbolically. This symbolic (and sometimes actual) death is the transformation of the hero.

The concept of transformation is the concept of change. Should the protagonist answer the invitation to adventure and survive the ordeal, he will have been altered forever by the experience. That change might be literal, as in a physical metamorphosis (a wolfman), or psychological, as in the acquisition of new knowledge or wisdom. Thus, just as real people are born, live, and die, fictional heroes travel from birth to death with each journey. Symbolically, the hero changes simply by acquiring the knowledge and experience during the ordeal. At the journey's end, the hero is different. His or her personality has been altered forever.

Successful heroes are not always happy. Often they wish they had never accepted their invitations to adventure. Heroes might be worse for wear at the end of their journeys. Often, they die physically. Nevertheless, if they do survive physically, they are armed with new knowledge for the rest of their lives.

## The Treasure



Should the protagonist overcome his ordeal, he reaps his reward. Whatever the hero desired when he accepted his invitation to adventure is now his for the taking, because he successfully completed his ordeal. The successful protagonist wins the prize. He gains his freedom, finds the girl, discovers the truth, recovers the treasure, or acquires some psychological benefit. He wins. Yet in doing so, the protagonist is transformed. He is resurrected to a different level. He achieves his goal, for better or worse. He has opened Pandora's Box, survived the ordeal, and symbolically dies, reborn to live the balance of his life armed with the wisdom and knowledge of his experience.

The protagonist who completes his ordeal reaps his reward or treasure. The reward is what motivates the hero. It may be real or imaginary, intrinsically valuable or important only to the hero, but it is sufficient to impel the protagonist to take the chance presented by the invitation to adventure.

Upon the completion of his journey, the hero dies, at least symbolically, and is reborn in an altered state – he is transformed. He may literally die as a result of his quest, or simply change drastically enough from his newly acquired knowledge and experience to be a different person than the one who originally embarked on the quest. This complete alteration of the protagonist, if only in attitude, is the *Transformation*.

Thus, we have learned that enhancing our enjoyment of books and movies requires an understanding of a few principles:

1. We look for the herald of the invitation to adventure.
2. We identify the nature of the task facing the hero.
3. We spot the hero's alter ego, which helps us to learn about traits of the hero himself, as he prepares for his journey.
4. We observe the hero as he embarks upon his quest.
5. We recognize the difficulty facing the hero and assess the chances of success.
6. We identify the helpers that will aid the ordinary hero in his time of need and improve his chances of successfully completing the heroic quest.
7. We identify the treasure the hero seeks, which might be important only to him.
8. We understand that the hero always dies – at least symbolically, as the hero is transformed.

### **The Three Basic Steps:**

#### **1. Invitation to Adventure**

Look for the *Herald*  
Look for the *Alter Ego*

#### **2. The Ordeal**

Look for the *Helpers and Guides*

#### **3. The Transformation**

Look for the *Treasure*

## **Suggested Reading**

Botta, JJ. *Surviving the Journey: A Universal Approach for the Student Critic*.

Bloomington, IN: 1<sup>st</sup> Books Library, 2003.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Princeton: Princeton

University Press, 1968.

Foster, Thomas C. *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*. New York: Harper, 2003.

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960.

## **About the Presenter**

JJ Botta is a freelance writer and university professor. His resume contains numerous magazine and online publications on a variety of topics. He is the author of ten books in the fields of Writing and the Humanities. His works include:

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