

Spring 5-11-2012

The Hero's Journey: A Postmodern Incarnation of the Monomyth

Sarah Hoffman
University of Southern Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: https://aquila.usm.edu/honors_theses



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hoffman, Sarah, "The Hero's Journey: A Postmodern Incarnation of the Monomyth" (2012). *Honors Theses*. 39.

https://aquila.usm.edu/honors_theses/39

This Honors College Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors College at The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu.

The University of Southern Mississippi

THE HERO'S JOURNEY:
A POSTMODERN INCARNATION OF THE MONOMYTH

by

Elizabeth Sarah Hoffman

A Thesis

Submitted to the Honors College
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree of
Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of English

May 2012

Approved by

Martina Sciolino, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of English

Eric Tribunella, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair of Department of English

David R. Davies, Ph.D.
Dean of Honors College

Abstract

'**Monomyth**' is the term coined by James Joyce and popularized by Joseph Campbell in his seminal work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Its structure is delineated by Campbell, and it follows that of the traditional heroic myths that permeate human culture and history. Margaret Atwood's two companion novels, *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, incorporate Campbell's monomyth and transplant it into the realm of **postmodern dystopia**. In this way, Atwood offers an escape from the existential dilemmas that face the postmodern subjectivity through the self-perpetuated, **neo-shamanic** journey toward the recognition of **immanence**. The monomyth bridges this immanence with the separateness of the physical world, embodied by the individual hero, and thus the monomyth functions as a tool for understanding human existence.

Contents

Chapter One: The Monomyth and the Contemporary Hero	1 - 11
Chapter Two: <i>Oryx and Crake</i> : A Postmodern Landscape	12 - 17
Chapter Three: <i>The Year of the Flood</i> : The Journey of the Hero as Neo-Shaman	18 - 30
Chapter Four: Authentic Life as Atonement for Atwood	31 - 32

Chapter One: The Monomyth and the Contemporary Hero

Myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation.

—Joseph Campbell

The Hero with a Thousand Faces (xxiii)

There has been a single story recited throughout the entirety of human existence. It has always been the product of any particular culture's worldview. Humans, through their cultures, create myths as a narrative medium to understand themselves in relation to the world around them. Ancient cultures imagined the quests of heroes as metaphors for every-day life. A myth, rather than simply a fabricated story, is an extension of humanity through the use of metaphor. In the monomyth, an individual hero is able to successfully cycle through the tribulations of life in order to bestow boons upon fellow humans.

Today, our contemporary cultures are largely based upon myths—such as those of Jesus and Muhammad—over two thousand years old. Use of cosmology so outdated is an indication that contemporary culture is unable to ground itself in any particular set of cultural terms. This inability to accept any notion of a contemporary global culture that fully embraces all of humanity's diverse cosmology is the direct result of a Western cultural hegemony that dominates the cultural climate of secularist, postindustrial capitalism. This cultural domination is more easily referred to as globalization. It is the hegemonic nature of globalization that leaves Western society dependent upon the myths of two-thousand-year-old cultures as there is little mythic potential in a culture primarily focused on profit margins and alluring advertisements.

Within globalization, Western hegemony causes fractures throughout contemporary cultures due to the economic stress placed upon common people who are not representative of the ruling class. Multinational corporations play the roles of dominant nation states in this new form of colonialism. Indigenous cultures become entirely dependent upon secularist, postindustrial capitalism where before they existed with sovereignty. This relationship delivers tremendous economic stress in the form of the hegemonic commodity capitalism and technological secularization over cultures already fractured over the long course modernization, colonialism, industrialization, and postcolonialism. Globalization is a symptom of what Fredric Jameson calls the postmodern condition. Jameson explains the postmodern condition as it relates to the secular capitalist marginalization of art, and in relation, mythology:

What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation. Such economic necessities then find recognition in the varied kinds of institutional support available for the newer art, from foundations and grants to museums and other forms of patronage. [...] this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as

throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror. (191)

Secular capitalism dominates any sense of global culture to cater to an ever-increasing demand for novel-seeming goods and, more pertinent to this essay, art forms. This postmodern condition of the global culture contributes to the rise in ambivalence of identity throughout humanity. Contemporary fiction writers seem particularly sensitive to the underside of this postmodern cultural hegemony. Early twentieth century fiction writers begin to produce avant-garde works of contemporary characters in existential crisis. This sense of crisis is in response to the mechanisms of postindustrial capitalism and globalization that begin to dominate culture with the economy's stress upon the use of human life and labor as means for maximizing profit gain. Globalization thoroughly permeates world culture, and there are few mythic heroes who are able to emerge from this landscape.

In the twenty-first century, Canadian author Margaret Atwood rises to meet the challenge of contemporary contextualization through creation of a postmodern landscape in her novel, *Oryx and Crake*. *Oryx and Crake* delivers a world of rampant globalization where secularist capitalism subjugates technological advancement, and thus, all scientific and creative effort. Its companion novel, *The Year of the Flood*, portrays the intense struggles people face in this postmodern society, and, most importantly, it delineates the story of a contemporary mythic hero. *The Year of the Flood* provides a contemporary monomyth for a global society which still manages to function upon the basis of fractured, two-thousand-year-old mythologies.

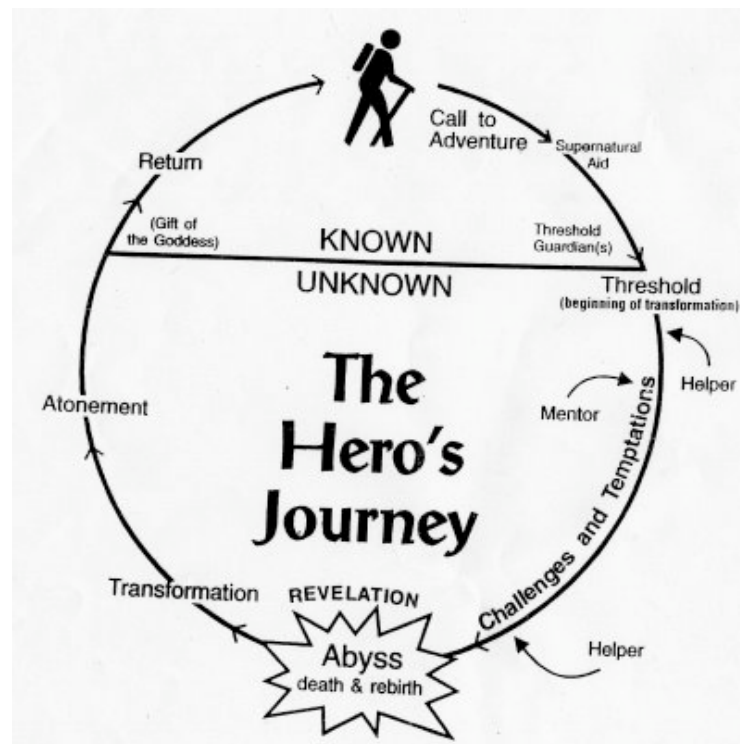
In his monumental book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell examines the monomyth throughout a cultural plethora of ancient myths. Jesus, Buddha, and Odysseus are three figures that famously represent the hero of the monomyth. Campbell attributes the term ‘monomyth’ to a passage in *Finnegan’s Wake* by James Joyce (Campbell, Mythos). Clarissa Pinkola Estés explains Campbell’s purpose for its use in the 2004 introduction to *Hero*:

[...] he puts forth the ancient idea—that the mysterious energy for inspirations, revelations, and actions in heroic stories worldwide is also universally found in human beings. People who find resonant heroic themes of challenges and questing in their own lives, in their goals, creative outpourings, in their day- and night-dreams—are being led to a single psychic fact. That is, that the creative and spiritual lives of individuals influence the outer world as much as the mythic world influences the individual. (xxv)

This term helps Campbell to communicate the psychic connectedness of experience that resonates within all humans. It enables him relate to readers the inner vein that brings vitality to the mythic adventures of the hero. Campbell’s scholarship in the various areas of literature, philosophy, religion, and psychoanalysis culminate in his realization that all myths are variant efforts to connect humanity with its inner, spiritual, world while maintaining connection with its outer, physical, environment. He thus borrows the term ‘monomyth’ to define this synthesis of mythologies.

In the monomyth, the hero embarks upon a ritualistic quest of adventure. As an

allegorical symbol for every person, the hero experiences the quest in the structure of a cycle with certain characteristics. Campbell delineates this cycle in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, “The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation—initiation—return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth,” (28). This is the most basic understanding of the cycle Campbell presents. The hero is called to venture forth into the unknown, and she may even be reluctant to do so. Supernatural representation interacts with the hero, and the hero wins a decisive battle and imbibes precious qualities through which she may bestow boons upon her people. The journey may be better understood through an image:



(Slashme)

This image translates the full cycle of the hero's journey into an easily comprehensible,

circular image. It is then easier to understand the repetition of the cycle as applicable throughout the life of every person in a culture. The hero represents her culture, and as Leland Ryken says, [...] a hero is representative. What happens to him or her is something with which all people can identify. [...] heroes sum up what a whole culture wants to say, [and] are essentially 'one of us,' possessing our strengths and weaknesses," (108). What myth teaches, then, is about one's self as part of the being of the world. The hero is a sign that points past itself toward a foundation of being, "that is one with the consciousness of the beholder," (Campbell, Collins). With these attributes in mind, the monomyth of the hero begins to come into view as a perennial story with incarnations spanning centuries of human existence. Even souls who were not born when he first published his book are able to find in themselves the interconnected life force that it perpetuates through its insights. This life force is described by Gilles Deleuze as "immanence," (179), and it is the recognition of this shared immanence throughout all of humanity that myth attempts to reconcile with the alienation of the individual.

A myth is the manifestation of a culture's tensions with the individual's physical reality, alienated by boundaries of space and bodies, and the spiritual existence of pure immanence. A spiritual existence of immanence is, as Deleuze, says, "A life is everywhere, in all the moments [...] is an absolute immediate consciousness whose very activity no longer refers to a being but is ceaselessly posed in a life. [...] A singular essence, a life ..." (179). This innate sense of existence is something all humans experience. Upon the realization of this shared existence through mythology, a person is able to connect both inwardly and outwardly with experience.

To better orient his argument, Deleuze evokes Charles Dickens to describe what *a* life is in relation to immanence:

A disreputable man, a rogue, held in contempt by everyone, is found as he lies dying. Suddenly, those taking care of him manifest an eagerness, respect, even love, for his slightest sign of life. Everybody bustles about to save him, to the point where, in his deepest coma, this wicked man himself senses something soft and sweet penetrating him. But to the degree that he comes back to life, his saviors turn colder, and he becomes once again mean and crude. Between his life and his death, there is a moment that is only that of *a* life playing with death. The life of an individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life that releases a pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life [...] with whom everyone empathizes and who attains a sort of beatitude. [...] a life of pure immanence, neutral, beyond good and evil, for it was only the subject that incarnated it in the midst of things that made it good or bad. (179)

Individuality fades as the immanence of life is recognized by others. This mystery of being draws toward it the curiosity of others who in themselves connect this sense of immanence with an individual who in life may be considered bad, but in death becomes a neutral life of essence. It is not to be said that immanence is only experienced in the event of death. Immanence is most easily recognized in all the moments a living subject experiences as between-moments, when one sees an event “yet to come and already happened,” (179). This between-moment is comparable to the notion of *déjà vu* that is

inexplicable in our experiences of life. Given this sense of déjà vu that is common throughout human existence, it is understandable that cultures throughout centuries of history have crafted myths as means by which to explore the mysterious trials of life. Myths, therefore, are metaphors created by human cultures that use allegorical symbols to reconcile the alienated individual with the communal immanence of existence.

In order to function properly, a myth must be grounded within a contemporary cosmology that directly links humanity with its surroundings. If people do not relate to the myth, it ceases to exercise the mind with its metaphor. A functional myth, according to Campbell:

[...] puts you in touch with a plane of reference that goes past your mind and into your very being, [...] The ultimate mystery of being and nonbeing transcends all categories of knowledge and thought. Yet that which transcends all talk is the very essence of your own being, so you're resting on it and you *know* it. The function of mythological symbols is to give you a sense of "Aha! Yes. I know what it is, it's myself." This is what it's all about, and then you feel a kind of centering, centering, centering all the time. And whatever you do can be discussed in relationship to this ground of truth. Though to talk about it as truth is a little bit deceptive because when we think of truth we think of something that can be conceptualized. It goes past that. (Campbell, Collins)

Campbell's study of various cultures throughout the world congeals with this solid idea of the function of myth. The function aforementioned coincides with the innate sense of

an immanent life. The monomyth bridges this immanence with the separateness of the physical world, embodied by the individual hero, and thus the monomyth functions as a tool for understanding human existence.

However, Campbell's monomyth epiphany occurs at a time when society seems to lack any definitive culture, and thus, mythology. Without a definitive culture for its basis, a myth cannot take root. A culture provides a set of circumstances surrounding an individual. It provides a common language for communication between people. In short, the culture sets the terms for the structure of the world that is depicted within a myth. Without a definitive culture to define these terms, the myth loses its power to impart a sense of shared existence. Western religion now literalizes the myths within the Bible, believing them to be historical events, rather than understanding the text as a vehicle for the economic and political tensions of its time period. This is one symptom of the failure of two-thousand-year-old cosmology in modern society's mythology. Campbell elaborates:

We're living in a period that I regard as a kind of period of a terminal moraine of mythology, so there's a lot of mythological rubbish all around. Mythologies that built civilizations, and are no longer working that way, are just in rubble all around us. (The Hero's Journey)

The myths that permeate most cultures today relate to the sociological aspects of cultures that have long been fractured throughout two thousand years of growth in industrialization and globalization. These fractures do not appear at first glance, but they are the unmistakable effects of secular Western hegemony.

Economically and socially, the world is connected today more closely than it has ever been before. Under the capitalist economic system, this allows for a commodification of Western secularist cultural ideals. The official accent of this culture is, indeed, placed upon economics and politics, so that, “[...] there has been a systematic elimination of the spiritual dimension. But it exists in our poets and arts. [in] a recessive condition, but otherwise people wouldn't have any spiritual life at all” (Campbell, Collins). Religious ideals are thus vehicles for the perpetuation of economic growth. This commodification and narrow focus of culture thus instills a sense of ambivalence in modern humanity's identity. Indeed, it has rendered the construction of a contemporary monomyth nearly impossible.

Though, as capitalism proves, where there is demand, a supply is sure to follow. Cultural bankruptcy due to the social acceleration of modernity throughout the twentieth century has resulted in a markedly contemporary existential unrest. A Western revival of interest in pre-modern cultures has prompted many, such as Campbell, to incorporate thought systems of shamanic cultures into their personal worldviews. Atwood's narrative delivers a dystopia of individualist alienation with a hopeful possibility of redemption through a glimpse of a communal interconnection through the shamanic work of the monomyth as a means by which to escape the secularist and fragmented postindustrial capitalist existence of a consumer culture.

This neo-shamanic process of self-discovery is the very action Campbell calls for in his lectures, “This statement of what the need and want is must come from you, not from the machine, and not from the government that's teaching you, or not even from the

clergy. It has to come from one's own inside," (Campbell, Collins). This challenge to define one's own terms mimics a call to adventure in search of the contemporary monomyth. It speaks directly to the contemporary individual as does the conclusion to *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*:

The modern hero, the modern individual who dares to heed the call and seek the mansion of that presence with whom it is our whole destiny to be atoned, cannot, indeed must not, wait for his community to cast off its slough of pride, fear, rationalized avarice, and sanctified misunderstanding. [It] is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse. And so every one of us shares the supreme ordeal—carries the cross of the redeemer—not in the bright moments of his tribe's great victories, but in the silences of his personal despair. (362)

Campbell urges the modern individual to seek out his divine immanence. The hero is not saved by society, but the culture of society is saved by the hero's courageous endeavor. The contemporary monomyth's challenge is the mystical fulfillment of the union of a singular cosmology of humanity. Union of a cosmology will usher society into a realm of never-before-experienced global interconnectedness with a structured pedagogical guidance for an individual through the inevitabilities of a lifetime in contemporary society. Being able to connect in this way will enable an individual to also find support in myths of the ancients. Margaret Atwood's companion novels, *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, rise from the cultural ashes of globalization to meet Campbell's challenge in a beautiful display of the constructive power of community.

Chapter Two: *Oryx and Crake*: A Postmodern Landscape

Margaret Atwood invokes dystopia in her companion works, *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* to once more deliver to readers a cautionary tale of speculation upon contemporary societal forces. Her purposes for doing so are evident in consideration of Gregory Claeys' explanation of dystopian utility:

'Dystopia' is often used interchangeably with 'anti-utopia' or 'negative utopia', by contrast to utopia [...] (good place), to describe a fictional portrayal of a society in which evil, or negative social and political developments, have the upper hand, or as a satire of utopian aspirations which attempts to show up their fallacies, [...]. (107)

With its inherent nature of interchangeability, Atwood employs dystopia to charge her works as critiques upon contemporary society. *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* envision a postmodern, secularized world of uninhibited capitalism where scientific pursuit is paramount. Combined with classical capitalist competition, the novels depict the evolution of corporations as they privatize and sequester scientific research. Their endeavors pay little heed to the environmental and social crises caused by the constant expansion of profit margins. In short, Atwood's works of speculative fiction represent a synthesis of her social, political, and environmental concerns (Howells 161).

In creation of such a synthesis, Atwood's novel, *Oryx and Crake*, presents a landscape of utter environmental destruction coupled with the annihilation of humanity. Atwood focuses *Oryx and Crake* as an extrapolation of the postmodern society. The

novel introduces a male protagonist, Jimmy/Snowman, who is seemingly the last human survivor in a post-apocalyptic world populated by a biogenetically-engineered species of humanoids called Crakers. It is impossible for Snowman to adequately identify with the Crakers due to his previous existence as Jimmy in the pre-apocalyptic world. Snowman is his present incarnation of identity, existing and not existing, (O&C 7), trapped in the vastness of a desolate planet purged of human existence by an unnamed plague of illness.

As readers encounter Jimmy/Snowman, he is a character of split consciousness, and he often experiences feelings of extreme guilt. He feels partially responsible for the destruction of humanity due to his involvement with Crake, the man who solely orchestrated the purge of humanity and left Jimmy responsible for the safety of the Crakers. As Coral Ann Howells elaborates on his condition, “he [...] exists in a state of double consciousness, working by associative leaps between ‘now’ and ‘then’ in an effort to escape from a devastated world littered with the wreckage of late twentieth-century civilization reminding him daily of what he has lost,” (172). His narrative becomes his refuge from the harsh reality he faces daily. His frequent flashbacks to his past consume the novel and allow for a wider perspective of his world and his current situation. His sense of identity is thus split between these two incarnations of experience. This schizophrenia of identity is thoroughly characteristic of the postmodern subject (Jameson 194).

In this sense, he narrates his experiences in a desperate attempt to reclaim his identity (Howells 172). The chronological slippage of his narrative often blends the voice of narration into his active voice of identity. This narrative technique is known as free,

indirect discourse. As defined by Georgetown University, “Free, indirect discourse is a more comprehensive method of representation—one which many times makes indistinguishable the thoughts of the narrator and the thoughts of a character,” (“Free”). This fragmentation of the subject is another key postmodern aspect of *Oryx and Crake*. Jimmy’s split of consciousness is not singularly depicted in his flashbacks, but it is planted in the very text of the novel itself. For example:

How long had they been going at it? Snowman wonders now. Had the two of them been having it off behind the pigoon pens [...] But his father (or so he believes) was too awkward and bad at lying to have become involved in full-fledged treachery and betrayal without Jimmy’s mother noticing. (O&C 66)

The location of the narrator within this excerpt is impossible to identify. The narrator muses along with Jimmy/Snowman about the possibility of his father’s infidelity to his mother. The possessive pronoun ‘his’ is the key indication of this dissolution of identity. Thus, free, indirect dialogue in an aesthetic strategy Atwood employs to further imbibe a climate of the postmodern condition into her novel.

Furthermore, whatever shred of identity Jimmy/Snowman clings to is thoroughly married to his passion for words and language. He quests, unknowingly, for the realization of immanence, and this is most closely achieved through his reverence of language. In his isolation, he remembers words from his past, but they begin to dissolve in meaning without other humans who share their knowledge:

From nowhere, a word appears: *Mesozoic*. He can see the word, he can

hear the word, but he can't reach the word. He can't attach it to anything. This is happening too much lately, this dissolution of meaning, the entries on her cherished wordlists drifting off into space. (O&C 39)

His isolation from communication with other humans begins to result in dissolution of meaning. What good are words without others who attribute the same meanings to them? Without a community who shares the same concepts of words, they lose meaning. This dissolution of meaning creates paranoia in Jimmy. He begins to worry if he is hearing voices instead of experiencing memories. He is frightened of losing his grasp on his identity and his sanity.

However, repetition of words and phrases is the main activity that keeps him sanely in touch with the past. Jimmy remembers the sentence, "It is the strict adherence to daily routine that tends toward the maintenance of good morale and the preservation of sanity," (4), but he does not know why or from where it surfaces. Dunja Mohr asserts, "For Atwood language then causes reality, it restores the past and a potential future as anchors of thought for Jimmy," (18). Jimmy's memories of the beautiful language he once studied and clung to in his previous life are the vitality of life that keeps him sane without the presence of other humans. His inability to identify with the Crakers' sense of identity does not prevent him from attempts to exercise narrative with them.

Indeed, it is this action that justifies his presence among them. He is able to explain their existence to them through creation of mythologies. Howells notes, "through storytelling, he teaches the Crakers the rudiments of symbolic thinking. [...] which makes us wonder if the primitive human brain is hard-wired not just for dreaming and singing

[...] but for narrative as well,” (171). It is the sense of community that language creates in the novel that brings to it a sense of hope buried deep beneath the surface. This hope is later brought to the surface by interpretation of the novel’s final scene, but before that point, Mohr notes:

In *Oryx and Crake*, narration, story-telling, and a valorization of the multiplicity of language and words not only constitute forms of survivalist defiance, but also hope for the persistence of creativity. [...] utopian glimpses are thus contained in the very possession of words, of language itself as a keeper and bearer of utopia. For the narrator and postmodern anti-hero Jimmy/Snowman in *Oryx and Crake*, poetic discourse and the remnants of language to which he clings offer redemption and the means for (psychological) survival and hope. (18-9)

Jimmy finds within himself a rich plethora of language which he uses to build a bridge between himself and the culture of the Crakers. It is this language, also, that will unite him with fellow survivors at the end of the novel. This union will occur, symbolically, around the ancient space of communion: a fire.

In *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood settles her protagonist in a landscape destroyed by the postmodern world. His mind dissolves in isolation from fellow humans. The harshness of the elements deteriorates him from the outside as he completes the same action within himself. He is left to wander a landscape where genetically-engineered humanoids and animals dominate his weak sense of humanity. Rather than present her readers with a hero who triumphs, Jimmy/Snowman is the ambiguous anti-hero who

makes a space in which renewal only *may* be possible. Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* now has a figure who shares a postmodern experience, but Jimmy is a foil for the true hero of Toby in *The Year of the Flood*.

Atwood's novels appear to heed the call to adventure Campbell creates in his assertion that the statement of need and want must come from within the individual rather than from any collective institution. Atwood situates her novels within a postmodern climate indicative of the implications of a secularized and fragmented postindustrial capitalist consumer culture. Her narrative is her personal journey as a hero and champion of contemporary literature. Campbell asserts, as previously discussed in this essay, "[...] there has been a systematic elimination of the spiritual dimension. But it exists in our poets and arts. [in] a recessive condition, but otherwise people wouldn't have any spiritual life at all" (Campbell, Collins). Atwood attempts to resuscitate life into the recessive condition of art to better acquaint humanity with its spiritual heritage.

Through her narrative, Atwood exercises the spiritual tensions of contemporary society. She suggests a return to our roots, quite literally. Her hero, Toby, imbibes a holistic lesson of the cycles in life that enable her to connect herself with the earth, all its creatures, and her fellow humans. In this way, Atwood evokes the structure of the monomyth to create a commonality among all of contemporary humanity, and she bridges the gap between spirituality and a secularized, postindustrial capitalist society through the healing effects of a return to communal interconnectedness.

Chapter Three: *The Year of the Flood*: The Journey of the Hero as Neo-Shaman

Atwood's dystopian literature certainly incorporates a postmodern landscape, but *The Year of the Flood* also delivers with it the saving grace of neo-shamanism. Neo-shamanism, as understood in regard to *The Year of the Flood*, is:

Amorphous, eclectic in nature, leaderless, [...] the universe is conceived of as friendly or benign; there is no dichotomy between good and evil. Knowledge and direction come from "within," from one's higher self, inner voice, or inner wisdom. [...] Emphasizes [...] metaphorical images of the shaman as [...] a guardian of the earth, [...] rituals, and [...] calling spirits to them rather than undertaking journey to spirits in the spirit world. ("Core Shamanism")

It is a self-perpetuating journey toward the realization of life as immanence. The neo-shaman in *The Year of the Flood*, Toby, is a direct incarnation of the hero of the monomyth. Her journey toward self-discovery, or realization of immanence, presents the cycle of the hero in a novel way. Atwood presents Toby as the mythic hero of postmodernity.

In *The Year of the Flood*, materialism fills the space of spirituality. Scientific pursuit creates a hierarchical dichotomy between the pursuit of scientific knowledge and the pursuit for artistic expression. Scientific communities are enclosed to entirely alienate scientists from others as the competitive corporations seek to usurp one another in their

projects. Artistic expression is diminished into the commodification of advertisement. These separate sects of corporate scientists and stunted artists illuminate a fragmentation of any cultural identity. Within the novel these elements are symptoms of society's illness as a direct result of postmodernity.

In contrast to this dismal setting, Atwood plants a strong, spiritual group in the center of ghettos that have emerged outside the walls of scientific compounds. God's Gardeners attempt to avoid the poisonous materiality the corporations perpetuate. They instead focus efforts upon restoration of what they view to be humankind's stewardship of Earth. The group utilizes powers of language and song to teach lessons of spiritual responsibility. In *The Year of the Flood*, Atwood provides a protagonist of feminine subjectivity in the character of Toby to offer a possibility of heroic return from these implications of postmodernity.

Likewise, Toby views God's Gardeners skeptically. She is desperate to survive when she joins the group, and despite her skepticism, she recognizes the value in the Gardeners' resistance to the toxic machine of society. She begins to follow the ways of the Gardeners, but she inwardly refuses to become truly indoctrinated. Toby begins to find purpose with the Gardeners even though she is unable to identify her sense of self at this point in her life. Toby becomes her own guide in the safe haven of the Gardeners' Edencliff Rooftop Garden. She pulls from philosophy of the Gardeners to initiate her own journey toward the possibility of a new existence. She is able to apply her education in holistic healing to help the Gardeners' botanical goals. This utility allows Toby a sense of purpose among the Gardeners, and despite her reluctance, she finds herself at home with

this eclectic religious affiliation. Their beliefs begin to permeate her thought, but to some extent she is still unable to fully commit to their doctrine. She participates in practices such as vigils and retreats, but she does so in her own method of participation. Toby's journey is solitary.

Therefore, Toby embarks upon her neo-shamanic, spiritual quest in the cradle of Edencliff Rooftop Garden. She does so unconsciously; Toby's neo-shamanism is the culmination of her reactions to the events that befall her. Joseph Campbell delineates the narrative cycle of the shamanic journey in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, "[...] the adventure of the hero normally follows the pattern of the nuclear unit above described: a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return," (33). And so Toby's journey goes. She pulls from her experiences, the lessons of the Gardeners, and her gut instincts to lead her through the inauthentic existence the corporations have perpetuated for humanity and the post-apocalyptic landscape postmodernity. Toby's spirituality is best articulated by Andrei Znamenski, "[...] shamanism rarely manifests itself in a pure core form. Frequently, spiritual practitioners weave it into their existing spiritualities, which they might not even position as shamanism. After all, shamanism is viewed as a spiritual technique," (251). This technique provides the basis for Toby's mental, physical, and spiritual survival in the postmodern world she inherits.

Separation and Departure: The Call to Adventure

Toby begins her journey as a young woman. She has suffered at the hands of the corporations that poisoned her mother and drove her father to suicide. In her struggle for

survival, Toby finds a job working for a malignant man who soon begins to physically, and sexually, abuse her. As she begins to drown in her sorrow and hopelessness, Toby expects to soon be dead. She does not expect what Campbell explains as the critical, first step in the shamanic journey:

A blunder—apparently the merest chance—reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood. [...] blunders are not the merest chance. They are the result of suppressed desires and conflicts. They are ripples on the surface of life, produced by unsuspected springs. And these may be very deep—as deep as the soul itself. The blunder may amount to the opening of a destiny. Thus it happens. (*Hero* 46)

Toby's blunder occurs when a procession of God's Gardeners files past the stand where she works selling SecretBurgers. When Adam One engages her in short conversation, her territorial boss, Blanco, assumes the Gardeners are harassing Toby. He threatens Adam One with violence. He charges forward and misses, and he falls in the street among the crowd. Toby scurries to help him, but has a sudden change of heart:

Toby felt curiously exhilarated. Then she kicked Blanco's head. She did it without even thinking. She felt herself grinning like a dog, she felt her foot connect with his skull: it was like a towel-covered stone. As soon as she'd done it she realized her mistake. How could she have been so dumb? [...]

In addition to her panic Toby felt unreal, and a little dizzy. (41-2)

Toby's destiny is thus opened with the swift kick of her foot. She is instantly ashamed of

her repressed unconscious's manifestation of desire. She does not understand her relationship with herself in this way just yet. Her recent detachment from the world she knows frightens her, as all else is unknown, but the Gardeners offer her a safe repose from the violence of society.

Here, it is important to notate that without Adam One's engagement in conversation with Toby, she may not have been moved to act on her impulse. Campbell defines Adam One's significance as:

[...] the 'herald'; the crisis of his appearance is the 'call to adventure.' [...] As apprehended by the mystic, it marks what has been termed 'the awakening of the self.' [...] But whether small or great, and no matter what the stage or grade of life, the call rings up the curtain, always, on a mystery of transfiguration—a rite, or moment, of spiritual passage, which, when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth. The familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand. (*Hero* 47)

This is the first moment in the novel where Toby takes action in a way that will result in a positive impact manner. She thus frees herself from the chains of her previous life of servitude to Blanco, and moreover, to the ever-grinding machine of postmodern society. Without Adam One as her herald, Toby would not be called into action. Campbell elaborates, “This first stage of the mythological journey—which we have designated the "call to adventure" —signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred h[er] spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of h[er] society to a zone unknown,”

(*Hero* 53). Toby does not yet know it, but she is now on the journey to self-discovery and renewal.

Separation and Departure: Supernatural Aid and Crossing of the First Threshold

Toby spends her time with the Gardeners learning useful skills to prepare for the Waterless Flood—the end of civilization the Gardeners expect looms in the near future. Her education at Martha Graham in holistic healing is valuable among the Gardeners. She soon earns a place of respect in her new community. She remarks on the organization of its hierarchy:

Adam One insisted that all gardeners were equal on the spiritual level, but the same did not hold true for the material one: Adams and Eves ranked higher, though their numbers indicated their areas of expertise rather than their order of importance. In many ways it was like a monastery, she thought. (45)

Toby soon becomes close with Pilar, or Eve Six as she is titled, who is in charge of keeping the bees and botanical remedies for the Gardeners. She is a wise woman, older than Toby, and she enlists Toby's help in her work due to Toby's gift of working with plants. Toby trusts Pilar. She is the one Gardener to whom Toby confides easily. Pilar teaches Toby about the bees and the mushrooms she grows. Campbell's archetype for Pilar is as thus, "For those who have not refused the call, the first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure (often a little old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces [s]he is about to pass," (*Hero* 63). Pilar provides Toby with information about the effects of mushrooms she grows. These can be

used to dull pain, anxiety, and even to induce death. Pilar's presence in the novel is entirely ethereal. She seems to exist simply to guide Toby toward her realization of immanence.

In relation to Toby's journey, Campbell explains Pilar's presence and relation to Toby more fully:

What such a figure represents is the benign, protecting power of destiny. The fantasy is a reassurance—a promise that the peace of Paradise, which was known first within the mother womb, is not to be lost; that it supports the present and stands in the future as well as in the past (is omega as well as alpha); that though omnipotence may seem to be endangered by the threshold passages and life awakenings, protective power is always and ever present within the sanctuary of the heart and even immanent within, or just behind, the unfamiliar features of the world. One has only to know and trust, and the ageless guardians will appear. Having responded to h[er] own call, and continuing to follow courageously as the consequences unfold, the hero finds all the forces of the unconscious at h[er] side. Mother Nature herself supports the mighty task. And in so far as the hero's act coincides with that for which h[er] society itself is ready, [s]he seems to ride on the great rhythm of the historical process. (66)

Pilar is Toby's inspiration to connect with others, her self, and the earth. This inspiration is faint to Toby, in contrast to her reluctance to accept the Gardeners' philosophy. It is

nearly unbeknownst to her. Pilar expresses her faith in Toby, “‘One day,’ said Pilar, ‘when you’re an Eve, you’ll understand more.’ ‘Oh, I don’t think I’ll ever be an Eve,’ said Toby lightly. Pilar smiled,” (105). Pilar becomes a positive guidance for Toby, and it is Pilar’s faith in her that encourages the hero to accept the fruition of her journey.

So it goes, and Toby is eventually confronted with shocking news: Pilar, terminally ill, has chosen to end her life via her Death Angel mushrooms rather than suffer through her illness. Campbell enlightens the situation, “With the personifications of h[er] destiny to guide and aid h[er], the hero goes forward in h[er] adventure until [s]he comes to the “threshold guardian” at the entrance to the zone of magnified power,” (*Hero* 71). This entrance is the acceptance of Pilar’s now open position of Eve Six. Toby is still reluctant to indoctrinate herself into the Gardeners, but it is at the deathbed request of Pilar that she assumes the responsibility of the role. As the new Eve Six, it is now Toby’s job to bring the news to the bees and keep up the botanical concoctions. Pilar tells her, “‘I want you to have everything I’ve assembled here—all my materials. It’s a good collection, and it confers great power.’ [...] ‘I want you to be Eve Six, Pilar said. In my place. No one else has the talent, and the knowledge,’” (179-80). Thus Toby’s guide has directed her to the threshold she must pass through to initiate herself into the trials of her journey. Toby delivers the news of Pilar’s death to the bees, and she thus crosses this threshold and becomes the new Eve Six.

Separation and Departure: Belly of the Whale

Toby finds a sense of self in her work as the new Eve Six. It is no surprise that this lull is short-lived. When Blanco discovers she is living at the Edencliff Rooftop

Garden, Adam One thinks it best that she escape into exile for her safety and the safety of the Garden. Upon leaving, Toby receives a new identity and cosmetic surgeries for disguise. Campbell describes this annihilation of identity as the submersion into what he calls “the belly of the whale,” (*Hero* 83):

This popular motif gives emphasis to the lesson that the passage of the threshold is a form of self-annihilation. [...] But here [...] the hero goes inward, to be born again. The disappearance corresponds to the passing of a worshiper into a temple where [s]he is to be quickened by the recollection of who and what [s]he is, namely dust and ashes unless immortal. The temple interior, the belly of the whale, and the heavenly land beyond, above, and below the confines of the world, are one and the same. (*Hero* 84)

Through her willingness to protect God’s Gardeners, Toby readily discards all ties to the physical identity she was given at birth. Her body becomes her disguise as she undergoes this metamorphosis. She does not mourn the loss of her identity. Instead she clings to the lessons of the Gardeners for spiritual guidance. These lessons begin to become her identity. Her transformation is complete, and she is now assimilated into all versions of reality within the novel. She resides simultaneously within herself, which is her rich temple of spirituality, and the external, postmodern, world.

Initiation

Thus, it is not until the Waterless Flood destroys civilization that Toby begins to fully converge with the Gardeners’ ideas of the nature of God, the Spirit, or immanence.

The Gardeners believe that all living things are imbued with the Spirit. This does not become consummated in Toby's mind until she is left completely alone in the presence of the Spirit:

Mourning dove, robin, crow, bluejay, bullfrog. Toby says their names, but these names mean nothing to them. Soon her own language will be gone out of her head and this will be all that's left in there. Ooodle-oodle-oo, hoom hoom. The ceaseless repetition, the song with no beginning and no end. No questions, no answers, not in so many words. Not in any words at all. Or is it all one huge Word? (349)

Toby is thus initiated into immanence. The absence of human contact resonates with the increasing abundance of natural presence. Toby's mind begins to understand all existence as a single, unified Spirit. Language and naming are left in the material world of an extinct civilization. Campbell illuminates her enlightenment:

The gods and goddesses then are to be understood as embodiments and custodians of the elixir of Imperishable Being but not themselves the Ultimate in its primary state. What the hero seeks through his intercourse with them is therefore not finally themselves, but their grace [...] the power of their sustaining substance. This miraculous energy-substance and this alone is the Imperishable; the names and forms of the deities who everywhere embody, dispense, and represent it come and go. (*Hero* 168)

Toby now sees all life as embodiment of this Imperishable Being. She has become indoctrinated into the cycle of life the Gardeners praise and strive to uphold. While some

species may perish physically, Toby knows they will provide nourishment to others and return in various forms. Toby is now a gardener of God: she must spread the seed of her knowledge of this immanence to other humans to create a new existence for humanity. She has won her elixir, and she must complete this task to cross the threshold into her Return.

Return

Toby comes to the knowledge that she is not the last person left in the world. She discovers her long-lost friend, Ren, and together they venture out to find Ren's lost companions. They discover several of their friends are safe along the way, but Toby and Ren continue to find Ren's best friend, Amanda. In the novel's end scene, Toby makes soup from the bones of a rakunk—a genetically spliced creature of raccoon and skunk descent, "When she put the bones of the rakunk into the water she spoke the words of apology and asked for its pardon. 'But you didn't kill it,' I said to her. 'I know,' she said. 'But I wouldn't feel right unless somebody did this,'" (429). This exemplifies Toby's return and her mastery of the two worlds—the spiritual world of immanence and the material world of separation. Campbell relates:

The two worlds, the divine and the human, can be pictured only as distinct from each other— [...]. The hero adventures out of the land we know into darkness; there [s]he accomplishes h[er] adventure, [...] and h[er] return is described as a coming back out of that yonder zone. Nevertheless [...] the two kingdoms are actually one. The realm of the gods is a forgotten dimension of the world we know. And the exploration of that dimension,

either willingly or unwillingly, is the whole sense of the deed of the hero.

(Hero 201-2)

Despite the rakunk being an unnatural creation of humanity, Toby is able to identify its validity of spiritual existence. It, too, lives to breathe the air and dies to feed other creatures. Toby can easily glide between these two realms of existence now that she has merged the two within herself. She has completed her neo-shamanic journey, and she now exists to instruct others in the Light of true, undiluted existence. She has reached,

[...] the realization of truth, and so becomes ripe, at last, for the great at-one-ment. H[er] personal ambitions being totally dissolved, [s]he no longer tries to live but willingly relaxes to whatever may come to pass in h[er]; [s]he becomes, that is to say, an anonymity. The Law lives in h[er] with h[er] unreserved consent. *(Hero 220)*

Toby has made her peace, and she now seeks to help others attain this for themselves. Her experience has blessed her with knowledge and insight that were unimaginable in her previous life. Toby's place in this new existence is to guide others toward healing. In this sense, she has finally, and truly, replaced Pilar as Eve Six. She is now the guide for another's journey through existence.

Thus, Toby has freed herself from the constraints of postmodern society. She is no longer influenced by an anonymously powerful hand to experience fear and anger. The loss of civilization has given her the chance to create a new precept of civilization for herself and her new community. She has gained the skills necessary to help others who still suffer from the afflictions caused by postmodern society. In this sense, Toby has

completed her heroic journey as a neo-shaman and now possesses the power to create a new world of meaning and unite it with the realm of true spiritual immanence for herself and her companions.

Chapter Four: Authentic Life as Atonement for Atwood

The Year of the Flood concludes with a ceremonial exchange between Toby and her fellow survivors around the circle of a fire—the ancestral setting of community and open communication. Campbell explains, “The effect of the successful adventure of the hero is the unlocking and release again of the flow of life into the body of the world. [...It] pours from an invisible source, the point of entry being the center of the symbolic circle of the universe,” (*Hero* 37-8). Atwood places the characters in this setting to symbolize the community as the center of the symbolic circle of the universe. Atwood asserts humanity shares an existence of immanence with the universe. Her creation of a post-everything landscape allows room for renewal in a world eviscerated by secularist technological pursuit under a regime of Western hegemony.

The Year of the Flood is Atwood’s attempt to suggest an authentic life of ritual and reverence is the means by which one may come into realization of immanence and escape from the existential crises of postmodernity. Campbell concludes, “the hero of myth [achieves] a world-historical, macrocosmic triumph [and] brings back from his adventure the means for the regeneration of his society as a whole,” (*Hero* 35). The novel pulls its definitive essence from the signified of the myth: recognition of the life force of immanence is the supernatural elixir for return and renewal Toby inherits from the triumph over her trials. Her authenticity is validated through this triumph and her experiences of the natural rituals of life. She imbibes this reverence for all life from her experiences with the Gardeners, and she is thus reunited with her ancestral heritage of

interconnectedness with the earth. She recognizes within herself something that links her very being with every living creature in the world. She has come full circle at the close of the novel. She is now the hero, a neo-shaman, who performs a final ritual, a ceremony of healing, for her physically and existentially injured comrades. She will usher them into their own journeys toward recognition of immanence in this new stage of the world.

Thus, the novels provide a communitarian response to the decimation inflicted by a postmodern culture obsessed with abstract profit margins. Atwood suggests community-oriented spirituality as a means by which to escape the empty existence of a consumerist culture in order to attain a sense of a global community and culture. In this manner, Atwood delivers her dystopia with a cheering tone of the possibility of redemption. She has structured her postmodern dystopia with the ancient monomyth of the hero's journey, and she has thus ushered in an idea of possible return to authenticity, organic experience, and recognition of our interconnected immanence in a world devoid of contemporary cultural mythologies.

Works Cited

- Atwood, Margaret. *Oryx and Crake*. London: Bloomsbury, 2003. Print.
- Atwood, Margaret. *The Year of the Flood*. New York: Anchor Books, 2009. Print.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2004. Print.
- Campbell, Joseph. "Mythic Reflections: Thoughts on Myth, Spirit, and our Times, an Interview with Joseph Campbell." *In Context*. 12. By Tom Collins. (1985): 52. Web.
- Claeys, Gregory. "The Origins of Dystopia: Wells, Huxley, and Orwell." *The Cambridge Companion to Utopia*. Ed. Gregory Claeys. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 107. Print.
- "Core Shamanism and Neo-Shamanism." *Shamanism: an Encyclopedia of World Beliefs, Practices, and Culture*. Ed. Mariko Namba. Walter and Eva Jane Neumann. Fridman. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004. 49-57. Print.
- Deleuze, Gilles. "Immanence: A Life." *The Postmodernism Reader*. Ed. Michael Drolet. New York: Routledge, 2004. 178. Print.
- "Free Indirect Discourse." *Narrative Wiki*. Georgetown University, 14 Sept. 2008. Web. <http://narrative.georgetown.edu/wiki/index.php/Free_indirect_discourse>.
- The Hero's Journey: A Biographical Portrait. Dir. Balnicke, Janelle, and David Kennard. Prod. Holoform Research Incorporated, Mythology Limited. William Free Productions. Perf. Joseph Campbell. Direct Cinema Limited, 1987.

- Howells, Coral Ann. "Margaret Atwood's Dystopian Visions: *the Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*." *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*. Ed. Coral Ann Howells. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 161. Print.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *The Postmodernism Reader*. Ed. Michael Drolet. New York: Routledge, 2004. 189. Print.
- Mohr, Dunja. "Transgressive Utopian Dystopias; The Postmodern Reappearance of Utopia in the Disguise of Dystopia." *Zeitschrift Fur Anglistik Und Amerikanistik* 55.1 (2007): 5-23. Print.
- Mythos: The Shaping of our Mythic Tradition. Dir. Walter, Robert. Prod. Bill Free. Perf. Joseph Campbell. PBS, 1999.
- Ryken, Leland. "Hero Stories." *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible*. 6th ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House Company, 2001. 107. Print.
- Slashme. *The Hero's Journey*. 2009. 4chan.org.
- Znamenski, Andrei A. "Toward the Ancient Future: Shamanism in the Modern West." *The Beauty of the Primitive: Shamanism and Western Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. 233-72. Print.