**Mythology**

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**Classical Mythology In Modern-Day Literature**

Mythology has long been a source of entertainment throughout many cultures around the world. In almost every culture, people enjoy the enthralling tales of heroes and villains contesting against one another in epic battles and devious plots fraught with peril. The human love for adventurous stories hasn’t diminished a bit through the centuries, and though the original myths and legends still thrive, many new tales of different heroes still capture the imagination of the world. Although the stories and characters vary in innumerable ways, the progression of each individual tale is surprisingly similar to the legends of old. The ancient records also manifest themselves in modern stories through other outlets than the plot.

In almost every myth or legend, there are different characters that are essentially the same idea expressed in different ways. Examples of these figures range from the Norse gods Loki and Odin, to the Greek god Zeus, or even to Coyote in the American Mythos. Many cultures have characters to represent figures like the Trickster, such as Loki and Coyote. A grand and powerful leader of all the gods is also common across the globe, Zeus and Odin being excellent examples. These figures and personages withstood the ravages of time and now poke their heads into modern novels, albeit in as a different character.

Another figure that appears in almost every ancient mythological tale is the Threshold Guardian. These imposing figures are usually a major obstacle on the quest to a magical world or item that the hero must bypass in order to continue. And more often than not, the hero must travel past this guardian again on the way back from their goal. For example, in order to enter the underworld ruled by Hades (Greek Mythos), one must first struggle past the giant three-headed beast know as Cerberus. Also, some heroes such as Odysseus, must pass through a set of clashing rocks during their voyages in order to continue with their quest.

Another similarity between the two different ages of storytelling would be the divine assistance that is usually given to the hero at different times during their quest for glory. Medea, who helped the hero Jason achieve his goal of receiving the Golden Fleece, would be a prime example from the mythological side of the coin.

Among these and other similarities throughout the modern and mythological stories, one of the most prominent likenesses between the two types would be the path of the hero. The path of the hero is a “map” of sorts that most heroes follow throughout their lives. According to the path, the hero, or heroin as the case may be, is first born to divine or royal parents before their life is threatened and they are hidden away until they are old enough to pass a test that signals the end of their childhood so as to prepare them to accept the quest set before them which will inevitably bring them to face death and become stronger than they were before because of it in order to help them complete their quest and achieve a glory that is usually short-lived as they are bound to either live unhappily ever after or leave their home forever, destined for paradise.

The famous author, Homer, wrote one of the more famous versions of the story of Odysseus called the Odyssey. This story of one of the most magnificent heroes of Greek Mythology follows the path of the hero beautifully, save the unhappily ever after part. That combined with the fact that it is one of my personal favorites, compel me to use it as my prime mythical example of the path of the hero.

In the beginning of the story, Odysseus is born to the rulers of the island Ithaca, and right from the start things concerning this child’s fate begin to peak interest as the grandfather appropriately names him Odysseus, or “trouble”. The boy grows fast, proving many times over that he is destined for greatness. He leaves the bondage of his childhood behind as he successfully kills a boar in a great hunt. From there he continues to show his worth as he becomes a great warrior. Then, as all things go, he leaves his home land to seek glory, ultimately ending up participating in the great and terrible Trojan War. After many other adventures worthy of Odysseus’ attention, including visiting the underworld, passing numerous threshold guardians (such as the clashing rocks and the sirens), and being offered immortality by two different goddesses, he finally returns home, and what a welcome party he gets. In fact, when he arrives, he finds one hundred suitors attempting to court his wife and plotting his demise. After settling that issue, Odysseus finally gets what many heroes, such as Jason, never get; a happily ever after. This brief and cut-up synopsis doesn’t by any means do the true tale justice, but it will suffice enough for one to see the path of the hero in the plot.

This path is very easy to see in ancient mythology, but to the knowing reader it can just as easily be spotted in more recent scripts. One very popular and entertaining story is the thrilling tale of Harry Potter. Written by J. K. Rowling, this epic series of books tells the tale of “the boy who lived” and his life growing up in the magical world of wizards.

The story begins with the boy, Harry being born to two very important wizards during a time of fear from the evil wizard, Lord Voldemort. Lord Voldemort, who had been seeking the means to make one immortal since a very young age, came across a prophecy predicting his doom. After realizing the threat the prophecy held over him, he soon deduced the meaning and, seeking to beat fate, murdered Harry’s parents and then tried to do Harry in, but instead was destroyed by his own curse after it rebounded off of a magical shield Harry’s mother had created by dying for him. In order to protect him, he is hidden with his non-magical aunt and uncle. Ten years later, Harry discovers he is a wizard and sets off to enter the world of magic.

Throughout the series, a certain point of the path of the hero is repeated more often than in any other story I have personally come across. It seems that Harry is a death magnet, for every year since the beginning of his wizarding studies, Harry has almost died, usually more than once. At the end of his first year of school, he saves a magical stone from the forces of evil by fighting his way through a series of obstacles, including a giant, three-headed dog, an enchanted chess board, and even a troll, before defeating the wizard behind the scheme. And after every encounter with death he learns and remembers, his memory and experience waxing strong in the face of danger. Harry’s victory in rescuing the Sorcerer’s Stone marks the point in his life when he is no longer a child, and is not to be underestimated. During these many perils, he eventually witnesses the rebirth of Lord Voldemort, who had not died, but simply been forced into hiding until the opportune moment. Though the topic is debatable, I personally feel the moment Harry “accepts his quest” is when he decides to face Voldemort.

After his enemy’s reincarnation, the plot around Harry thickens as he discovers how and why the Dark Lord was able to survive and return. He discovers, with much help and guidance, that Lord Voldemort had separated himself from his soul, therefore sustaining his life through bodily death. But not only did he separate from his soul, but he tore it asunder repeatedly until he had seven separate pieces of his soul, which he stored in various objects he deemed valuable before hiding them away from the world, surrounded my myriad spells and enchantments.

Now, in classical mythology, a subject known as a separable soul pops up in some stories, such as Paris of Troy, who would have lived for eternity if his mother had never burned a log that was empowered by a god. J. K. Rowling also uses the separable soul(s) in Harry’s tale, and at the end of the series, Harry discovers that he himself was a separable soul which Voldemort had unknowingly created when he attacked Harry as a boy. Thus, in order to defeat Voldemort, Harry had to die to destroy the part of evil that resided within himself. But upon dying, he realized that the soul fragment had died rather than him, leaving him free to destroy Voldemort once and for all. Afterwards, he married the love of his life and lived happily ever after, free from the bonds of evil. Harry experienced many other things during his life, but these key points help emphasize the path of the hero, however askew and out of order it may be.

Another modern fable equally displays the path of the hero as well as threshold guardians and separable souls. This epic tale is yet to be finished, so the end of the path is unclear to all but the author, but nevertheless, the path of the hero is brilliantly incorporated into the plot. Known as the Inheritance Cycle, or more commonly the Eragon Series, these books display the ancient patterns in interesting ways.

Thus far, the story is of the young boy Eragon, who was born the son of one of the last Dragon Riders and a servant to another Rider. The boy is hidden away in a small village, far from the eyes of the evil King Galbitorix. The boy’s father also hides in the village after faking his death, in order to watch over his son. Eragon grows to the age of sixteen, never knowing either of his parents, living under the rule of the destroyer of the Dragon Riders. Then Eragon comes across a dragon egg that soon hatches for him, and things change drastically. He and his dragon, Saphira, must soon flee his village in order to save what is left of his family from the evil clutches of the King. He is accompanied by Brom, the town storyteller and Eragon’s father.

They then venture out of the empire to the rebel group known as the Varden, but Brom is killed by the King’s servants along the way. After a short stay with the Varden, an epic battle that permanently cripples Eragon, and the death of a few friends, Eragon travels north with Saphira to receive training in the ways of the Riders from the Elves. He discovers upon his arrival that another Rider besides himself and the King still lives. This ancient Rider takes him as his pupil and teaches him the ways of old, as he nor his dragon can do much else due to their grievous wounds. During his stay with the elves, ancient magic of the dragons heals his ailment, making it again possible for him to succeed in overthrowing the King. He then sets out for the Varden, who are once again in a battle of epic proportions. During the battle, he finds out that his traveling companion, Murtagh, whom he had joined forces with after Brom’s death and thought dead after the battle of Farthen Dur, has reluctantly joined forces with the King, and has a dragon of his own.

The battle ends, and in the months that follow the war rages on. Eragon discovers when he returns to the elves that his father was Brom and that the elves know the source of King Galbitorix’s unparalleled power. As it turns out, dragons can remove from within themselves a stone that contains their soul, and that their Rider can carry their life force with them instead, saving them from physical death. The King had gathered the mass store of these souls during his rise to power, and from them he draws his power. The only way to kill him is to destroy or separate him from these stones and strike the final blow. As the final installment of this cycle has yet to be published, the end of this particular hero’s path is unclear, but even so the path is there.

Though all of these tales differ drastically from one another in context, the plot still follows the basic path of the hero. Many other oddities such as divine assistors, threshold guardians, and more also are evident among them. These core points in these stories exist in ancient texts for the same reason as they do in modern ones: to entertain. People are drawn to certain types of tales, and judging from the trend of the centuries, the path of the hero has been, and will continue to be, a crowd favorite.