

Week 03: The Hero's Journey

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Christopher Vogler outlines the stages of the Hero's Journey in his book, *The Writer's Journey*. I found the diagrams that he included to correlate the stages to where they fall in a three act play helpful. In general, the outline and explanations all made sense and were helped by including examples from known films and stories. These particular quotes stood out to me as meaningful guides for creating believable character motivation resulting in good storytelling.

In any good story the hero grows and changes, making a journey from one way of being to the next: from despair to hope, weakness to strength, folly to wisdom, love to hate, and back again.

I feel like this statement greatly summarizes the goal of the hero's journey. For a story to carry weight, the protagonist must grow or evolve in some way. For a character to grow, she must be challenged. Subtle changes don't make for a compelling story. Over time, we all experience growth, but we typically have situations in our life that make us question our beliefs or test our weaknesses. How we respond to those situations are the triggers for the most impactful changes in our personal character and dictate the next stages of our life. These are the stories we want to tell.

Movies are often built in three acts, which can be regarded as representing 1) the hero's decision to act, 2) the action itself, and 3) the consequences of the action.

When Vogler talks about stage 5, Crossing the First Threshold, he talks about it as the turning point between Act One and Act Two. Putting this moment on a timeline is helpful from a writer's perspective and makes sense as a natural breaking point. I also appreciated how he related these moments to romantic stories and not just adventure and mythology. Committing to entering a relationship with another person can take courage. You know that you may be uncomfortable, you know that it might be scary, but you are willing to put yourself in that position for a greater reward, love.

In *Titanic*, after initially refusing Jack's call, Rose commits to entering Jack's world, rejecting her own family and stereotypes, casting aside what other's may think of her. Jack can't offer her wealth or stability, but he can offer her adventure and exhilaration like she's never experienced. She is willing to take the risk for what she considers a greater reward.

Sometimes the Elixir is treasure won on the quest, but it may be love, freedom, wisdom, or the knowledge that the Special World exists and can be survived. Sometimes it's just coming home with a good story to tell. Unless something is brought back from the Ordeal in the Inmost Cave, the hero is doomed to repeat the adventure.

This sentiment really stuck with me. What does the character bring back from the Ordeal. If a character survives the challenges she is faced with, but is not changed from the experience, then what was the point of the story? The hero may go on a quest for a physical item, or to defeat an enemy, or to attain love, but how has the experience of that quest affected them? I wonder if this is why sequels never work as well as the original movie. The first time we meet a character, we don't know if she will be up for the challenge and if she will survive. When we witness her overcome great obstacles and transform her character with greater integrity and mental resilience, we are assured that we can leave the story, that she will be ok. A sequel must present a new obstacle that will challenge the hero in a different way, otherwise, there is no challenge to overcome.

Vogler's overview of the Hero's Journey helped me to relate it to many types of stories and characters, not just mythical adventures. His examples allowed me to see scenarios from romance to drama as related to the journey. My biggest takeaway is the idea that the values are of most importance. As Vogler writes, "The images of the basic version — young heroes seeking magic swords from old wizards, maidens risking death to save loved ones, knights riding off to fight evil dragons in deep caves, and so on — are just symbols of universal life experiences."