"WRITING IS FOR YOU, YOU ARE FOR YOU": BREAKING AWAY FROM PHALLOGOCENTRISM IN CAMPBELL'S MONOMYTH

Emma Hamilton

Western Carolina University

Introduction

On the cover of the third edition of "The Hero with a Thousand Faces" by Joseph Campbell is a photo mosaic comprised of individual portraits of people across all different cultures. These portraits combine to create a larger picture: the face of a man, with steel-cut cheekbones and a white beard, looking pensively off into the distance. This image perfectly represents the way Campbell's "hero's journey" myth works.

The myth of the hero's journey—often referred to as the "monomyth"—is a narrative template involving a hero who embarks on an adventure, overcomes trials along the way, and returns home transformed and empowered to enact change in his home world. Campbell's version of the monomyth is crafted around Freudian psychology, cultural studies, comparative religion, and an analysis of the cultural phenomenon known as the "rite of passage." Campbell applies the monomyth to stories within many world religions, including the stories of Siddhartha Gautama and Jesus Christ. Famous popular culture iterations of the hero's journey narrative template include the films *Star Wars: A New Hope, The Wizard of Oz,* and *The Lion King*; the novels *Moby Dick, Jane Eyre,* and *Siddhartha;* and the series *The Dark Tower* by Stephen King and *Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien, among countless others. The hero's journey narrative structure has been adapted for novelists in numerous writing craft books. It's also been adapted for contemporary psychotherapists, for screenwriters, and even for people undergoing yoga

teacher training. It's ubiquitous across the world's cultures—in religion, in art, in literature and film, in stories, in folklore.

Though many stories that evoke the Hero's Journey narrative feature female protagonists, its foundational principles are based on notions of masculinity and phallogocentrism that ground it firmly in the male tradition. The story of the hero's journey—including archetypal story elements like the "call to adventure," the "belly of the whale," and the "master of two worlds"—was built on masculine principles rooted in psychoanalytic psychology theory, focusing heavily on Freudian concepts, particularly the Oedipus complex. Although Campbell has called the hero's journey the "one, shape-shifting yet marvelously constant story we find" (1) across cultures and throughout human history, his articulation of the hero's journey myth was built around male-centric psychology, leaving female protagonists to shape their narratives to fit into a masculine template.

Evidence of the phallogocentrism inherent in Campbell's hero's journey myth can be found in its basis in Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Phallogocentrism, a term coined by Derrida, is a "combination of phallocentric and logocentric systems of thought" describing the privileging of the phallus in linguistic meaning-making (Klage). Derrida criticized phallocentrism and the "naming [of] the Phallus as the source and origin of language" (Klage). Derrida notes: "Freud . . . does nothing else but describe the necessity of phallogocentrism [and] its effects, which are . . . massive. Phallogocentrism is neither an accident nor a speculative mistake which may be imputed to this or that theoretician. It is an enormous and old root which must also be accounted for" (96). Campbell's hero's journey narrative also positions women as worlds, as mothers, as prizes, and as temptresses, but not as individual, autonomous agents—not as "heroes." Through careful source selection, Campbell adapts mankind's greatest stories, myths, and religions to one

man's—Sigmund Freud's—ideas of what drives human nature. In this paper, I will first discuss common criticism of Campbell's work. Then, I will show how Campbell's monomyth is rooted in Freudian psychoanalytical concepts—particularly the Oedipus complex—with no concern for representation of women's embodied experiences. I will discuss the ways that women are represented in the monomyth and the effects of this representation on pop culture and women's interests. Finally, I will look toward other, more feminine modes of writing to encourage the imagination of new stories that reflect women's embodied experiences.

Criticism of Campbell's Monomyth

Despite the pervasiveness of Campbell's iteration of the monomyth, his ideas have been met with much criticism from folklore scholars. It is difficult to place parameters on what is and isn't considered folklore, but generally, folklore is the "the art, stories, knowledge, and practices of a people" ("What is Folklore?"). This can include cultural stories and songs, but also material objects, rituals, and even food. Alan Dundes, a critically acclaimed folklorist, discusses Campbell's lack of formal education in folklore in his 2004 invited presidential plenary address to the American Folklore Society. He calls Campbell's monomyth a "combination of legend and folktale," not "myth proper" (392). Dundes laments the conflation of folklore and mythology with Campbell's name, noting an anecdote in which he visited a Barnes & Noble and the entire folklore/mythology section had been relabeled "Joseph Campbell" (393).

Another folklorist and prominent scholar who was president of the American Folklore Society from 1977-1978, Dr. Barre Toelken criticizes Campbell's work for displaying source-selection bias:

> Campbell's works tried to demonstrate that many recurrent themes and plots were part of the human psychological inheritance and were therefore susceptible to cross-cultural

> interpretation. The problem is, of course, that irrespective of the universality of archetypal images, different cultures organize and interpret (and thus understand) the symbols quite differently. Campbell could construct a monomyth of the hero only by citing those stories which fit his preconceived mold, and leaving out equally valid stories . . . which did not fit the pattern. (413)

Toelken decries various fields of psychology (including Freudian psychoanalysis) that use folklore as “a window on personal and cultural psychology” (413). He says that most psychologists, not being trained in folklore, aren't studied in cultural variations of mythologies, instead often adapting one version of a tale that’s removed from cultural contexts (413). This results in incomplete, inappropriately adapted, and sometimes even appropriated stories that have been universalized to suit the psychologist’s needs. For example, Toelken criticizes the adaptation of an English-Slovak version of a story in the popular book *Women Who Run With Wolves*, a version he calls a “highly unlikely occurrence” in culturally specific folklore (413).

Beyond folklorists, some anthropologists and world religions experts also find fault with Campbell’s adaptations of cultural folklore. In a criticism of Campbell’s book *Occidental Mythology,* Dr. Robert Ellwood, professor emeritus of World Religions at University of Southern California, remarks that Campbell oversimplifies historical matters, warping them to “make myth mean whatever he want[s] it to mean” (153). Campbell's work is so interdisciplinary, spanning the fields of mythology, anthropology, psychology, and literary studies, that most scholars in these fields don’t recognize Campbell as an expert in *any* of these disciplines (Grebe 50). Instead, as Dr. Robert Segal notes, Campbell focuses dogmatically on his own interpretations of myth at the intersections of these disciplines. Segal calls Campbell an “evangelist for myth,” noting that he often fails to acknowledge other theorists in his work (qtd.

in Grebe 50). The fact that Campbell's work has been met with so much academic criticism, then, is no surprise: Campbell left his doctoral program due to lack of approval from his advisors on his areas of study ("Joseph Campbell").

Roots in Psychoanalysis and the Oedipus Complex

In "The Hero with a Thousand Faces," Campbell introduces the concept of the monomyth as Freudian psychoanalysis made manifest in cultural events and male protagonists' responses to those events. He says that "we must learn the grammar of the symbols, and as a key to this mystery [he knows] no better modern tool than psychoanalysis" (xii). Campbell describes psychotherapists as "experienced initiate[s] in the lore and language of dreams," the only ones capable of ushering young heroes through their various "crises of self development" (5). The psychotherapist's role is that of the "Wise Old Man of the myths and fairy tales whose words assist the hero through the trials and terrors of the weird adventure" (6). He opens with a chapter on myth and dream, recounting various dreams to evoke man's "first and only emotional involvement, that of the tragicomic triangle of the nursery—the son against the father for the love of the mother" (3). This phenomenon, on which Campbell bases his monomyth, is also referred to as the Oedipus complex. The Oedipus complex, as recounted by Campbell, describes the "most permanent of the dispositions of the human psyche" derived from an infant's attachment to its mother in an attempt to prolong the intra-uterine period (3). It's important to note that while Campbell doesn't use gendered pronouns when describing infants with the Oedipus complex (instead using words like "infant" and "child"), he includes a short footnote

that mentions the “case of the daughter” (4), signifying that the “infant” described in the main text is male.[1]

Many of the stages of Campbell’s hero’s journey—arguably all of them—are based on cultural rituals meant to herald heroes through “difficult thresholds of transformation,” commonly referred to as “rites of passage” (6). Usually, Campbell writes, rites of passage are marked by some form of *severance*, whereby the “mind is radically cut away from the attitudes, attachments, and life patterns of the stage being left behind” (6). Severance from the parents—“detaching our sexual impulses from our mothers and forgetting our jealousy of our fathers” (4)—being the chief concern of the Oedipus complex, Campbell’s monomyth can be viewed as a physical manifestation of the individual male’s psychological journey through various rites of passage as he grapples with being forced through severance to exit the intra-uterine period.

Freudian Reading of the Monomyth

Campbell's monomyth is explicitly rooted in Freudian psychoanalytical concepts. For example, the first stage of the hero’s journey—the “call to adventure”—is described as a direct translation of the unconscious fear of detachment. The call to adventure often starts with a “blunder” that reveals a new world (Campbell 42). But, according to Freud, blunders don’t happen by chance—they represent suppressed conflicts and desires (Campbell 42). The call to adventure is marked by “that which has to be faced, and is somehow profoundly familiar to the unconscious—though unknown, surprising, and even frightening to the conscious personality—[making] itself known” (46). Understandably, some heroes resist, resulting in a “refusal of the

[1] The footnote reads: “And as for the case of the daughter (which is one degree more complicated), the following passage will suffice for the present thumbnail exposition. ‘I dreamed last night that my father stabbed my mother in the heart. She died. I knew no one blamed him for what he did, although I was crying bitterly. The dream seemed to change, and he and I seemed to be going on a trip together, and I was very happy.’ This is the dream of an unmarried young woman of twenty-four” (Campbell 4).

call" (the second stage of the monomyth). But the refusal of the call "represent[s] . . . an impotence to put off the infantile ego, with its sphere of emotional relationships and ideals. One is bound in by the walls of childhood; the father and the mother stand as threshold guardians, and the timorous soul, fearful of some punishment, fails to make the passage through the door and come to birth in the world without" (Campbell 52). This quote includes a footnote that says, "See Freud: castration complex," showing that Campbell connects a young hero's fear of leaving home with a fear of castration—a predominantly male fear in Western culture. By using a metaphor about castration, Campbell illustrates his hero as a male in the Western world.

Once the hero finally accepts the call to adventure, his first task is the "crossing of the first threshold" into the unknown world, another narrative plot point inspired by psychoanalysis. "Beyond . . . is darkness, the unknown, and danger; just as beyond the parental watch is danger to the infant" (64). Campbell says that the unknown regions beyond the safety of home are full of "threats of violence and fancied dangerous delight," including monsters such as a half-man, "Wild Women' of the woods," the Acadian god Pan, and female sea snake demons called "mae," among others (65). Once the hero successfully conquers his fear of detachment by facing these monsters, he enters the next stage: the "belly of the whale," which Campbell also calls the "worldwide womb image," ready to be born again and face initiation as an adult that's psychologically ready to transfigure the world (74).

After metaphorical rebirth, the hero is strong enough to face the "road of trials." According to Campbell, facing these trials is the "process of dissolving, transcending, or transmuting the infantile images of our personal past" (84). After proving himself worthy by successfully navigating the road of trials and conquering the tests therein, the hero becomes ready to meet the "ogre father" in the "atonement with the father" stage of his journey, again

recalling the Oedipus complex. Now that the hero has outgrown "the mother breast" (115) and turned to face adulthood, he passes into the "sphere of the father—who becomes . . . the sign of the future task" (115). In this stage, the father is the "initiating priest" who allows the hero to pass into the larger world. But this gatekeeping role is complicated by "a new element of rivalry in the picture: the son against the father for the mastery of the universe, and the daughter against the mother to *be* the mastered world" (115).

The father (called "mystagogue" by Campbell) will only allow the son to pass into the next stage of initiation if he has been "effectually purged of all inappropriate infantile cathexes" (115). The hero's new role as master, subsuming his father, requires a "radical readjustment of his emotional relationship to the parental images" (115). According to the Oedipus complex, the severance from the mother and replacement by the father is deeply traumatic to the infant, hence the image of the "archetypal nightmare of the ogre father" (116). But this severance from the mother is only symbolic of a much more traumatizing event: the hero's circumcision, a distinctly *male* experience. While circumcision is usually performed at birth in Western culture, Campbell leans on folklore from other cultures that mark circumcision as a rite of passage, which partly informs the "atonement with the father" initiation stage. A marked example of circumcision as a rite of passage that Campbell cites is that of the boys of the Australian Murngin tribe. When a Murngin boy approaches his circumcision ritual, his elders tell him that "The Great Father Snake calls for his foreskin." The boy takes refuge with his mother, grandmother, or another female relative, turning women into protectors—literally of their son's genitalia, figuratively of his childhood (Campbell 116). Then the boy is sent on a long journey to visit neighboring tribes, during which he is introduced to "mythological phallic ancestors" (117). The result is that the "male phallus, instead of the female breast, is made the central point of the imagination" (117).

This circumcision ritual is meant to “release . . . the boy’s *hero-penis* from the protection of its foreskin, through the frightening and painful attack upon it of the circumciser” (117; emphasis added). Campbell quotes Dr. Róheim: “The father [i.e., circumciser] is the one who *separates* the child from the mother. What is cut off the boy *is really the mother.* . . . the foreskin is the child in the mother” (117; emphasis added).

Derrida’s concept of phallogocentrism can help us make sense of how the preoccupation with the "hero-penis" informs Campbell's narrative structure. And since phallogocentrism prioritizes the phallus in meaning-making, female heroines are physically excluded, as they do not possess the "hero-penis" necessary to participate in the rites of passage that underpin Campbell's stages of the journey. Campbell's source selection and the Freudian roots of his iteration of the monomyth exclude female embodied experiences by default, showing little to no concern for language and stories that come from women's bodies.

Women in the Monomyth

Campbell’s views on women’s roles in the transfiguration of the world can be found in their metaphorical representations: as worlds themselves, as prizes and wives, as temptresses. He describes “woman”:

> Woman, in the picture language of mythology, represents the totality of what can be known. The hero is the one who comes to know. As he progresses in the slow initiation which is life, the form of the goddess undergoes *for him* a series of transfigurations: she can never be greater than himself, though she can always promise more than he is yet capable of comprehending. She lures, she guides, she bids him burst his fetters. And if he can match her import, the two, the knower and the known, will be released from every limitation. Woman is the guide to the sublime acme of sensuous adventure. . . . The hero

> who can take her as she is . . . is potentially the king, the incarnate god, of her created world. (Campbell 97; emphasis added)

In this view, women are painted as worlds—or, as French feminist Hélène Cixous would say, as static continents waiting to be discovered, conquered, and colonized by their kings, incarnates of God (Cixous). Heroes are those who move, those who "progress" through life, and those who "come to know" women as worlds and as lovers in *their* "sensuous adventure." Women are motherly, recalling the Oedipus complex: they "lure" and "guide," and they always have knowledge just out of the hero's reach.

In "Woman as the Temptress," Campbell describes his ideas of duality through his articulation of why women appear as temptresses across the world's stories. "When it suddenly dawns on us . . . that everything we think or do is necessarily tainted with the odor of the flesh, then, not uncommonly, there is experienced a moment of revulsion: life, the acts of life, the organs of life, *women in particular as the great symbol of life, become intolerable* to the pure, the pure, pure soul" (Campbell 102; emphasis added). Here "the odor of the flesh" can be read as a fear of death or a temptation toward earthly experiences—which women as temptresses and symbols/creators of life represent—on the hero's journey toward enlightenment. "She is the womb and the tomb," he writes (95).

Campbell's articulation of women as static, stationary beings can only situate them as "temptations" luring male heroes from their journey rather than agential beings capable of journeying themselves. In one passage, Campbell even describes women as scenic hallucinations in his retelling of Saint Anthony's travels in the Egyptian region of Thebaid: "Saint Anthony . . . was troubled by voluptuous hallucinations perpetrated by female devils attracted to his magnetic solitude. Apparitions of this order, with loins of irresistible attraction and breasts

bursting to be touched, are known to all the hermit-resorts of history" (104). Only their body parts are described, and their only agency here is the ability to lure and distract.

Ironically, the static woman-world is the very place the hero seeks to make home at the end of the story. Campbell writes that "the mystical marriage with the queen goddess of the world represents the hero's total mastery of life; for *the woman is life, the hero its knower and master*" (101; emphasis added). The hero's goal is "full possession of the mother-destroyer, his inevitable bride. With that he knows he and the father are one: he is in the father's place" (101).

Campbell says that "it has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that *carry the human spirit forward*, in counteraction to those constant human fantasies that tend to *tie it back*" (7; emphasis added). This statement about the function of myth paired with Campbell's concern with the Oedipus complex paints a picture of male psychological concerns as the chief driving impulse of all mankind, the singular act of propulsion of human beings through their various rites of passage. This means that his representations of women have, too, taken on their own sense of rhetorical becoming and created their own harmful effects in turn. Even as his heroes near death, Campbell still has them obsessed with something so temporal as genitalia; in the second portion of life, he says, "what is difficult to leave…is not the womb but the phallus" (8).

Since Campbell's monomyth is fundamentally tied to Freudian psychoanalytic theory, his contributions are by their very nature phallogocentric. This is a dire issue for women's interests, given the prevalence of Campbell's ideas. Freud himself admitted to being stumped by the very idea of the agency of women: "The great question that has never been answered, and which I have not yet been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is 'What does a woman want?'" (qtd. in Jones).

The Monomyth as Metaphor in Film, Literature, and Popular Culture

Most contemporary adaptors of the monomyth focus heavily on the plot structure it inspires—a structure that has been tried and true in literature, Hollywood, and beyond. It is essential, however, to consider the psychoanalytic underpinnings of the monomyth, and the rippling, harmful effects that perpetuating this narrative can have on women's agency. We have experienced this "constant story" (Campbell 3) played out a thousand times in our literature, our film, and our own embodied experiences, but it is a male story that does not consider women as autonomous agents. Campbell has explicitly said that "women don't need to make the journey; they are the place that everyone is trying to get to" (Murdock Interview).

This matters because Campbell's iteration of the monomyth has made its way into almost every form of mass media in which we interact—especially film and literature. While Campbell's articulation of the monomyth didn't directly inspire the three-act story structure used ubiquitously in film and literature, its shape is particularly malleable for breaking down into three distinct acts. In fact, screenwriter, educator, and Hollywood development executive Christopher Vogler famously adapted Campbell's monomyth into a screenwriting guide called "A Practical Guide to The Hero with a Thousand Faces," which he later expanded into the textbook *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. Vogler has worked in development for Warner Bros. Pictures, Walt Disney Studios, and Fox 2000 Pictures; he has also taught screenwriting at the University of Southern California and the University of California, Los Angeles. Often included on reading lists for students in film school, Vogler's *Writer's Journey* textbook has become a popular manual for aspiring screenwriters.

Aside from the popular culture cornerstones mentioned earlier, there are numerous examples of the monomyth's applications outside of film and literature. Many contemporary

psychologists and therapists use the hero's journey as a life coaching and therapeutic tool, some of whom espouse this strategy without mention of or with little attention given to its Freudian underpinnings.[2] The hero's journey has been used in yoga teacher training, self-help media, education, substance abuse and addiction recovery materials, content about living with chronic illness, and more. Campbell's ideas have been remixed and recirculated so many times and in so many ways—not just in popular culture—that it's almost become a theory of living, a lens through which personal experiences can be viewed and understood. It's become a way of making sense of ourselves and the world around us—or, as Lakoff and Johnson might call it, a "metaphor to live by." Many of these iterations of Campbell's monomyth do genuinely help people make meaning from their experiences; however, they are also predicated on notions deliberately meant to exclude women from active agency in the world and in their own lives.

Murdock's Recovery of the Monomyth

Perhaps the most significant feminist recovery of Campbell's monomyth is Maureen Murdock's *The Heroine's Journey: Woman's Quest for Wholeness*, originally published in 1990. Murdock is a therapist and trained depth psychologist with scholarly interests in mythology and memoir writing. Murdock wrote *The Heroine's Journey* "to describe an alternative to the stereotypical ego-driven masculine hero's journey admired in mainstream culture. Up until [1990], there was no recognizable archetypal pattern that fit women's experience" (*Heroine's Journey* xv).

The focus of Murdock's heroine's journey is to "heal the internal split between woman and her feminine nature" as, according to Murdock, women suffer from dissatisfaction in their lives due to "follow[ing] a model that denies who they are" (*Heroine's Journey* 2). According to

[2] See "A Hero/Heroine's Journey: A Road Map to Trauma Healing," "The Metamorphosis of the Hero: Principles, Processes, and Purpose," and "How to Use the Hero's Journey as a Life-Coaching Tool".

Murdock, women's quests are to heal the "deep wound of the feminine" (*Heroine's Journey* 3) that results from the need to appropriate male modalities of power in order to earn success and satisfaction in a patriarchal culture. Murdock describes women's journeys as *interior* and being focused on *healing*—quests toward becoming "whole human being[s]" (*Heroine's Journey* 3). "I wanted to assure women that it was neither necessary nor healthy to follow the path of the masculine hero's journey, because it was spiritually arid and didn't fit our mythology," she writes (*Heroine's Journey* xvi).

In *The Heroine's Journey,* Murdock offers up a new mythology for women, one that's derived from Campbell's monomyth but that departs from it in its language. For example, instead of "Atonement with the Father," Murdock posits that female atonement must be with the mother as reconciliation after identifying as the *father's daughter;* she calls this stage "Healing the Mother/Daughter Split." In its simplest terms, Murdock's narrative posits that women become separated from the feminine, choosing instead to wear the mask of the masculine to succeed in Western society. Along their road of trials, women are betrayed by their father figures and the masculine values they have adopted, resulting in an urgent need to reconnect with the feminine, atone with the mother, and reconcile both masculine and feminine values within themselves to heal their feminine wound and create success on their own terms. Although Murdock's feminist recovery recognizes that Campbell's monomyth forces women into narrative structures that aren't meant for them, it still positions women as standing still with only *interior* journeys to make.

The Heroine's Journey can't be considered a direct response to Campbell, however, because it differs so much in its purpose. As a trained therapist and psychoanalytic psychologist, Murdock wrote *The Heroine's Journey* for personal usages as a self-help book. *The Heroine's*

Journey is coded at Barnes & Noble as “Popular Psychology.” In the preface to the book, Christine Downing mentions that Murdock doesn’t primarily focus on folklore, instead focusing on “divinely ordinary” (xii) female experiences—her own, mostly, as she writes in the first-person point-of-view, as well as anecdotes from her patients. Downing stresses the importance of Murdock’s choice to write in a first-person point-of-view, connecting this writerly choice to similar historically significant choices made by second-wave feminists in the 1970s eager to inject more of themselves into their writing.

Hélène Cixous: Écriture Féminine

Even in Murdock's popular feminist recovery of Campbell's monomyth, women are still symbolically confined to their interiority. But a woman's agency does not stop at the border of her body. Fortunately, post-structural feminists, such as French theorist Hélène Cixous, have taken up these concerns, “[critiquing] phallogocentric Western philosophy for its subordination of the feminine to the masculine” (Klage). In her essay “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Cixous articulates the writing style “écriture féminine”—women’s writing—which is meant to help women transcend phallogocentrism by focusing more on embodied aspects of feminine language. Cixous's theory can help women creatives break away from Campbell's hero's journey altogether, creating new narrative models that recognize women as both active agents and as protagonists. Écriture féminine helps us ask: What could new narratives concerned with what women *do*—not just how they feel—look like? Narratives built on women’s embodied experiences instead of men’s subconscious, Freudian concerns? Écriture féminine encourages women to explore the connection between their bodies and their authorship, to reject phallogocentrism in favor of a feminine mode of writing which equates bodily and authorial autonomy. “Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it,” Cixous writes,

directly encouraging her women readers to claim their bodies, their writing, and their *agency* as their own.

Screenwriter and actor Brit Marling regularly engages this mode of writing, often using a variety of genres to reflect her lived experiences. “We live in a world that is a direct reflection of these stories we’ve been telling,” she writes, referring to the material effects of exposure to violence against women’s bodies in popular film. Frustrated with the diminutive roles she has auditioned for, she turned toward screenwriting:

> Even when I found myself writing stories about women rebelling against the patriarchy, it still felt like what I largely ended up describing was the confines of the patriarchy. The more fettered I felt inside the real world, the more I turned toward science fiction, speculative fiction and lo-fi fantasy … to [leave] reality just far enough behind to give me the mental freedom to imagine female characters behaving in ways not often seen onscreen. (Marling)

What Marling describes as her inability to get outside of the “confines of the patriarchy” can also be described by Lakoff and Johnson as a “metaphor we live by.” In their work *Metaphors We Live By,* Lakoff and Johnson point to linguistic evidence that we think—not just speak—in conceptual metaphors. Therefore, using the same language as one metaphor, even in an attempt to rebuke it, reinforces it by confirming its fundamental value to conceptual understanding. Marling again felt this tension when acting strong female lead characters:

> The more I acted the Strong Female Lead, the more I became aware of the narrow specificity of the characters’ strengths—physical prowess, linear ambition, focused rationality. Masculine modalities of power. . . . Because what we really mean when we

> say we want strong female leads is: "Give me a man but in the body of a woman I still want to see naked." (Marling)

What could our narratives look like if they were not largely dominated by male sexuality? The hero's journey includes an "inciting incident, rising tension, explosive climax, and denouement. What does that remind you of? . . . a male orgasm" (Marling). Therein lies the link between Cixous's call for women to embrace their embodied experiences and authorial agency and to leave Freudian concerns—as well as outdated narrative templates—behind. Marling writes:

> I imagine new structures and mythologies born from the choreography of female bodies, non-gendered bodies, bodies of color, disabled bodies. I imagine excavating my own desires, wants, and needs, which I have buried so deeply to meet the desires, wants, and needs of men around me that I'm not yet sure how my own desire would power the protagonist of a narrative. (Marling)

Continuing to imagine new narrative shapes, new journeys, and new mythologies inspired by women's embodied experiences is essential for creating new metaphors for us to live by.

In creating new mythologies—and pushing back against those that gloss over women's stories—we create new ways to make sense of ourselves, others, the world around us, and our cultures.

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