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MAKING SUPERHEROES: A LOOK AT *THOR* AND *DOCTOR STRANGE* THROUGH THE MONOMYTH

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Making Superheroes: A Look at *Thor* and *Doctor Strange* Through The Monomyth

Süper Kahramanlar Yaratmak: *Thor* ve *Doctor Strange* Filmlerine Monomit Üzerinden Bir Bakış

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This thesis is dedicated...
To Ergin, for being my own superhero and teaching me “Everything changes, it all stays the same”.

To the memory of Onur Saltuk Dönmez, for teaching me “There is no secret ingredient”.

To myself, for “making my own way home”.

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Abstract

Throughout history, storytelling has been an indispensable part of human life. Myths, as a form of storytelling, are ways to both understand and conceptualize the world around us. Even though there are many different myths, more specifically mythological journeys of the heroes from various cultures, many of them share common patterns that can be identified as certain steps to complete these journeys. These recurring patterns are universally found in mythological hero stories and named *the monomyth*, or *the hero's journey*, by Joseph Campbell. The film industry, today's dominant storytelling medium, also adopts the monomyth to tell its own hero's journeys. With a change in the managerial direction, Marvel Studios started to produce its own superhero movies. Marvel's success has brought about an iconic recognition of superhero movies which have become one of the most popular genres of the last decade and have been universally appreciated by the mainstream audience. In this thesis, I aim to seek the similarities between the monomythic cycle of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey and the storytelling structure of the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* (*MCU)* particularly focusing on two movies, *Thor* (2011) and *Doctor Strange* (2016). I will also argue that to build successful storytelling, Marvel has incorporated the monomythic structure into the narrative design of its movies and the character arc development of the superheroes in the *MCU*.

Keywords: Joseph CAMPBELL, Monomyth, Hero's Journey, Superheroes, Marvel Cinematic Universe

Özet

Tarih boyunca hikaye anlatıcılığı insan yaşamının ayrılmaz bir parçası olmuştur. Bir hikaye anlatım şekli olarak mitler, dünyayı anlamanın ve kavramsallaştırmanın yollarındandır. Pek çok farklı mit, çeşitli kültürlerden kahramanların mitolojik yolculukları olsa da, ortak bir örüntüyü takip eder. Mitolojik kahramanların hikayelerinde tekrar eden bu örüntülere Joseph Campbell *monomit (kahramanın yolculuğu)* adını vermiştir. Günümüzün hakim hikaye anlatım ortamı olan film endüstrisi de kendi kahramanlarının hikayelerini anlatırken monomiti kullanmaktadır. Yönetimsel bir karar değişikliğiyle Marvel kendi süper kahraman filmlerini üretmeye başlamıştır. Marvel'in başarısı süper kahraman filmlerini daha önce hiç olmadığı kadar popülerleştirip, son on yılın en gözde janralarından biri haline getirirken, global ölçekte izleyici kitlesi tarafından beğenilmesini sağlamıştır. Bu tez, Joseph Campbell'ın monomitik yolculuğu ile *Marvel Sinematik Evreni*'nin hikaye anlatım yapısı arasındaki benzerlikleri *Thor* (2011) ve *Doctor Strange* (2016) filmlerini kullanılarak analiz etmek amacıyla yazılmıştır. Marvel, başarılı bir hikaye anlatımı için, Sinematik Evrenindeki filmlerin anlatı tarzını ve karakter gelişimini monomitik yapı üzerine kurmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Joseph CAMPBELL, Monomit, Kahramanın Yolculuğu, Süper Kahramanlar, Marvel Sinematik Evreni

MAKING SUPERHEROES: A LOOK AT *THOR* AND *DOCTOR STRANGE* THROUGH THE MONOMYTH

"All stories are journeys."
Joseph Campbell

Introduction

From ancient myths to modern stories, the hero constantly experiences a transformation of consciousness through trials and stages - either literal or symbolic - which appear in a sequence that leads and sometimes forces the hero to extend the limits of his/her own world and helps him/her reach a better version of himself/herself. There is no doubt that an ultimate reward awaits in the end, yet each gain comes with a renunciation.

The essence of the hero's journey is to be found in the combination of stages that perpetuate the hero's journey through hardship to overcome obscure resistances and maintain the progression. The structural backbone of each journey shares a common ground despite the fact that elements of each story, or journey in that sense, are conceivably different from one another – as it is also seen in structural similarities held by various rites of passage. Characters, triggering events, geographical settings, specific dangers, and the deeds of victory change, yet the stages of the journey remain unchanged; this unchanging structure is called the monomyth:

> 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. (Campbell 28)

Campbell substructures the monomyth through not only folktales but also through the life-stories of vastly known figures such as Gautama Buddha or Moses.

The adventure of the hero is expected to be in accordance with the nuclear unit -*the monomyth*-: "a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return" (Campbell 33). However, Campbell highlights the idea that the journey structure is not dependent on the hero, rather it has its own progression which is achievable in each journey.

Especially mythological journeys and incidents, such as flood myths from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the Hebrew Bible, or older gods being defeated by the younger generation in Greek, Nordic and Hindu mythology, contain plenty of resemblances when their progression is considered. From different corners of the world, stories of diverse societies could be seen as recapitulating a fundamental lineament that creates universality. This universality of the monomyth could be said to take its sources from certain specific characteristics. There are repeating principal points, such as separation-initiation-return in different societies with different foundational features and the archetypes which are basic forms and expressions of the human psyche.

> Whether the hero be ridiculous or sublime, Greek or barbarian, gentile or Jew, his journey varies little in essential plan. Popular tales represent the heroic action as physical; the higher religions show the deed to be moral; nevertheless, there will be found astonishingly little variation in the morphology of the adventure, the character roles involved, the victories gained. (Campbell 35)

The universality of the monomyth would not be wholly understood without stressing upon archetypes and the collective unconscious. The term "unconscious" has usually a more personal connotation than it being universal, which is causally linked with a person's own life and surrounding.

> The oldest and best meaning of the word 'unconscious' is the descriptive one; we call a psychical process unconscious whose

> existence we are obliged to assume -for some such reason as that we infer it from its effects-, but of which we know nothing. In that case we have the same relation to it as we have to a psychical process in another person, except that it is in fact one of our own. (Freud et al. 70)

However, the collective unconscious could lie at a deeper layer than personal unconscious and universally found in all humans – "*a common psychic substrate"* (Jung 4). Thus, it is appropriate to argue that the collective unconscious is a psychic common ground for all people, a repository, where archaic or primordial images continue to survive as the "*psychic residue*" driven from recurred human experiences and patterns of actions (Abrams 12).

> The collective unconscious is a part of the psyche which can be negatively distinguished from a personal unconscious by the fact that it does not, like the latter, owe its existence to personal experience and consequently is not a personal acquisition. While the personal unconscious is made up essentially of contents which have at one time been conscious but which have disappeared from consciousness through having been forgotten or repressed, the contents of the collective unconscious have never been in consciousness, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but owe their existence exclusively to heredity. (Jung 42)

These universal primordial images, *archetypes*, are the main content of the collective unconscious and archetypally formed ideas are means of the collective unconscious to express itself (Jung 21). Archetypes, which will be discussed in a more detailed manner in the first chapter, have a universal presence in the collective unconscious, and their expressions are mostly to be found in myths and folktales, whose patterns recur in diverse cultures. To put a final remark, there is a universal common share for the structure of narratives of humankind i.e. myths and folktales

have similar patterns such as the rites of passage. Switching the focus from individual distinctions to recurring patterns will make the monomyth more visible when we superimpose different mythological stories from various cultures.

Superhero movies are the most widely recognized stories of our time. Adaptation of characters and their stories from American comic books is the most common feature of today's modern superhero movies. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Marvel Comics and DC Comics gather nearly all the major widely known heroes in their universes. Spider-Man, Iron Man, Captain America, the Hulk, and Thor belong to Marvel; whereas Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman belong to DC.

Starting in the late 1930s, comic books with an increased variety of heroes/heroines began to gain prominence. They reached their creative peak with names like Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, who created the most iconic heroes such as Spider-Man, Thor, and Captain America. Chris Gavaler, a superhero comics scholar, states that "Comic book readers like to divide superheroes into Ages, the Golden of the 40s, the Silver of the 60s, the Bronze of the 70s, and so forth" (18). He describes *Action Comics* No. 1 as "the Big Bang of the Golden Age of Comics, the start point for superhero histories" (22) where *Superman* first appeared in 1938:

> Seeing the success of Action Comics, publisher Victor Fox hired Will Eisner to create Wonderman for *Wonder Comics* #1 (May 1939). […] Adding a unitard, cape, and chest icon to a standard pulp-magazine mystery man, Bob Kane and Bill Finger's "Bat-Man" premiered in *Detective Comics* #27, with the same cover date as *Wonder Comics* #1. Before the end of the 1939, comic book superheroes included: Arrow, Crimson Avenger, the Sub-Mariner, the Flame, the Sandman, Bozo the Iron Man, Hooded Justice, Blue Beetle, Amazing Man, the Human Torch, the Angel, Ultra-Man, and Doll Man. Soon there would be over two hundred. […] Though

> initiated by DC, the Silver Age is most defined by the early 1960s superhero comics of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and Steve Ditko published by Martin Goodman's newly rechristened *Marvel Comics*, known as *Atlas* in the 1950s, and *Timely* in the 1940s. From 1961–4 the company introduced the Fantastic Four, the Hulk, Spider-Man, Thor, Iron Man, the Avengers, the X-Men, Doctor Strange, and Daredevil. (Gavaler 7-8)

Richard Reynolds, another prominent comics scholar, notes that the superhero emerged during the Great Depression where many had to live through poverty and the faith in continuous economic progress was shattered (18). He also highlights the effect of WWII on the development of the heroes/heroines: "America's entry into World War II gave superheroes a whole new set of enemies, and supplied a complete working rationale and world view for a super-patriotic superhero such as Captain America" (8).

Moreover, there were many attempts to define what *superhero* means and "antecedents for the superhero can be traced back through pulp literature to ancient myths and legends" (Hatfield et al. xi-xii). Richard Reynolds states that Siegel and Shuster's Superman is a heroic amalgam of Samson and Hercules and there is a proclivity to make use of mythological heroes by comic creators:

> Just as other genres of comics have appropriated existing narrative mythologies (the Wild West, anthropomorphism, horror) so Siegel and Shuster created Superman from material already to hand: the myths of Samson, Hercules, and so on. There has arguably been a tendency for comic creators to legitimize their offspring by stressing their resemblance to legendary heroes or gods: a strategy to give their disregarded medium a degree of moral and intellectual uplift. Bill Batson's cry of "Shazam" that changed him into Captain Marvel is an acronym based on the initial letters of Solomon (for wisdom),

> Hercules (for strength), Atlas (for stamina), Zeus (for power), Achilles (for courage) and Mercury (for quickness). If the cry of "Shazam" invokes anything, it's the collective prestige of the Roman and Greek pantheons. (Reynolds 53)

Reynolds also mentions seven key points that are mainly derived from Superman "to construct a first-stage working definition of the superhero genre" (16). As a start, the "lost parents" motif is a fixed concern since many superheroes have a complicated parent-child relationship. This is also a recurring motif in many mythological stories such as in the stories of Moses and Babylonian King Sargon where we see the "exposed infant". Some of the heroes are depicted as the "man-god" whose source of power is mostly transcendental. A strong devotion to justice and contrasting (the normal and the superpowered) versions of the hero are other characteristics of a superhero. Besides, superheroes usually lead double lives where "the secret identity" creates a split like the Clark Kent/Superman duality. "Superpowers and politics" are other dilemmas of the hero. He is constantly forced to choose between "his conscience or the order", "the moral or the political". Finally, Reynolds points out that science is regarded as magic, and scientific terms and concepts are used as atmosphere-creating tools but in superficial or mystical ways. (12-16).

Another definition of superhero is worth mentioning. In his book *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre*, Peter Coogan suggests some key characteristics:

> A heroic character with a selfless, pro-social mission; with superpowers—extraordinary abilities, advanced technology, or highly developed physical, mental, or mystical skills; who has a superhero identity embodied in a codename and iconic costume, which typically express his biography, character, powers, or origin (transformation from ordinary person to superhero); and who is

> generically distinct, i.e. can be distinguished from characters of related genres (fantasy, science fiction, detective, etc.) by a preponderance of generic conventions. Often superheroes have dual identities, the ordinary one of which is usually a closely guarded secret. (qtd. in Gavaler 1)

From a storytelling perspective, we see that superhero universes have created their influential domains over decades. With endless story possibilities thanks to their episodic structure, the influence of superhero stories has rapidly grown and stopped being limited only to comics expanding into a variety of medium such as video games:

> Superheroes thus occupy a magical yet marginal position in contemporary popular culture. For the better part of a century, they have offered a seemingly inexhaustible resource for commercial artists, publishers, moviemakers, animators, radio and television dramatists, videogame designers, and other cultural entrepreneurs looking for fantastical, larger-than-life archetypes, tropes, scenarios, and what-ifs to entertain readers, listeners, viewers, and players. […] Emboldened by advances in digital visual effects, major film studios have been keen to tap the superhero revenue stream and also to blur the distinction between the superhero and the merely heroic. Thus the number of big-screen franchises derived from intellectual properties controlled by either Marvel (currently owned by Disney) or DC (Time Warner) continues to grow. (Hatfield et al. xii)

Being the dominant storytelling medium of our age, the filmmaking industry adopts the universal outline of storytelling, the monomyth, to tell its own hero's journeys. With a change in the editorial direction of the *Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU)* and developing main character storylines according to the monomythic patterns, superhero movies have become one of the most popular genres of the last

decade and they have been “universally” appreciated by the mainstream audience. In this study, I intend to present the similarities between the monomythic cycle of Joseph Campbell’s hero’s journey and the creative pattern of the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*, particularly focusing on two movies: *Thor* (2011) and *Doctor Strange* (2016). I will also argue that behind the success of the *MCU*, lies the adaption of the monomythic structure which plays a crucial role in attracting and appealing to a mass audience.

In the first chapter, I will examine myths and their functions within the societal context. I will also explain the details regarding the monomyth. In the second chapter, I will discuss the importance of the monomyth in Hollywood and give detailed information about Marvel’s history. In the third and fourth chapters, the narrative design of *Thor* and *Doctor Strange* will be analyzed through the monomyth.

CHAPTER 1: THE MONOMYTH

"Dream is the personalized myth, myth the depersonalized dream."
Joseph Campbell

1.1. FOUNDATIONS: MYTHS AND ARCHETYPES

The hero's journey, or the monomyth, has its origins in mythical narratives of ancient times. Similarities in the patterns of mythological stories constitute the ground for a universal storytelling outline, namely the hero's journey. Myths, exemplars of storytelling, have been the creative output of humankind throughout history, establishing a common ground for the way human consciousness comprehends notions in a certain way. From Greek and Egyptian myths to the myths of Cuna Indians', myths have a certain practical role in regulating rites and social order together with a more abstract function, generating an explanation for the affairs of the world on a grander scale. Before highlighting the significance and functions of myths, it would be more appropriate to start with a definition of the term *myth* itself.

> In classical Greek, "mythos" signified any story or plot, whether true or invented. In its central modern significance, however, a myth is one story in mythology—a system of hereditary stories of ancient origin which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain (in terms of the intentions and actions of deities and other supernatural beings) why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances, and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives. (Abrams 170)

Even though there is a straightforward dictionary definition as "story", in his book *Myth and Reality*, Mircea Eliade, a prominent historian and philosopher,

argues that it is almost impossible to make one comprehensive definition of myth to be credited by all scholars yet to be clearly understood by non-scholars. Being complex cultural phenomena, the concept and the functionality of myths have various contents having a proclivity to be interpreted differently depending on the viewpoint (Eliade 5).

Eliade states that in traditional societies where myth is still alive, its very function is to "supply models for human behavior while giving meaning and value to life" (2). Myths can provide insight to understand different forms of human conduct and activity along with their justifications if mythical narratives are not just considered savagery or sheer childishness but "the exemplary models for all human rites and all significant human activities - diet or marriage, work or education; art or wisdom" (Eliade 8).

> Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in Primordial Time, the Fabled Time of the "beginnings". In other words, myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality - an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior, an institution. Myth, then, is always an account of a "creation"; it relates how something was produced, began to be. […] In short, myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthrough of the sacred that really establishes the World and makes it what it is today. (Eliade 5)

Myths provide a foundation for generating a connection between humankind and the cosmos in archaic and traditional societies. The primordial stories offer exemplary models for how certain actions should be performed, but at the same time, those mythological narratives and events constitute humankind as it is today, mortal beings within a societal organization and subject to certain rules (Eliade 11). Eliade highlights some examples from different cultures where the

main justification for certain acts or rites is that they are believed to be inherited from the ancestors or the Gods:

> The Kai of New Guinea refused to change their way of living and working, and they explained: "It was thus that the Nemu (the Mythical Ancestors) did, and we do likewise." Asked the reason for a particular detail in a ceremony, a Navaho chanter answered: "Because the Holy People did it that way in the first place." We find exactly the same justification in the prayer that accompanies a primitive Tibetan ritual: "As it has been handed down from the beginning of earth's creation, so must we sacrifice… As our ancestors in ancient times did-so do we now.". (Eliade 7)

It should be noted that recollecting and re-enacting the myths carry significance for the members of archaic societies, not only for creating an explanatory and articulatory capacity for the natural events or abstract concepts, but also giving them the capability of repeating the acts of the Gods or the Ancestors *ab origine* (Eliade 13). According to this point of view, knowing the origin of things (object, animal, or plant) provides the power to control over them by repeating the acts of the Supernatural Beings. Eliade provides examples referring to Erland Nordenskiold's study about the Cuna Indians in which to tame certain animals, the secret of their origin stories should be known by the magician. If someone knows the secret of the creation of a poisonous snake, he/she could hold the creature without being harmed (qtd. in Eliade 15).

Having covered different aspects of myths, Joseph Campbell lists the functions of myths that can provide a deeper understanding of their significance. Campbell highlights four functions of myths: (1) the mystical function where the individual realizes the Universe as transcendent mystery and reconciles with it, (2) the cosmological function for creating explanations for the natural incident like seasons, agricultural cycle, (3) social order maintenance and placing the individual

into a society – separation from nature: “Circumcisions, subincisions, scarifications, tattoos, and so forth, are socially ordered brands and croppings, to join the merely natural human body in membership to a larger, more enduring, cultural body” (5), (4) and the pedagogical function serving as a guideline for the young through circumstances in life (33-34).

To put a final remark on the functions of myths in archaic societies, we should refer to Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski’s book *Myth in Primitive Psychology* in which he examines the role of myth among the Trobrianders, in Melanesia. Malinowski, a social anthropologist, states his findings from the ethnographical study which he conducted on Melanesian culture:

> Studied alive, myth, as we shall see, is not symbolic, but a direct expression of its subject-matter; it is not an explanation in satisfaction of a scientific interest, but a narrative resurrection of a primeval reality, told in satisfaction of deep religious wants, moral cravings, social submissions, assertions, even practical requirements. Myth fulfills in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom. (Malinowski 13)

Primitive societies are not the only ones that depend on myths to carry certain common functions, such as sustaining social order or containing practical rules. Civilized societies like Babylonians, Greeks, Hindus, or Egyptians also have series of uniformly common features in their mythological repertoires. Otto Rank focuses on the hero myths from different cultures, from Babylonians to Greeks, in

his book *The Myth of The Birth of The Hero* and discusses that "One of the chief problems of mythological research still consists in the elucidation of the reason for the extensive analogies in the fundamental outlines of mythical tales. These analogies are rendered still more puzzling by the unanimity in certain details and their reappearance in most of the mythical groupings" (1). He also underlines prominent mythological theories trying to provide an explanatory perspective for similarities in the outlines of mythological stories.

To demonstrate the similarities among mythological story outlines, Otto Rank looks at the birth myths of the heroes from the Babylonian King Sargon, to Karna, the hero in the ancient Hindu epic *Mahabharata*, from Perseus to Gilgamesh. In these stories, certain motifs constantly recur. Sargon and Karna myths share the same beginning pattern in which both of these heroes are exposed to the exterior world without protection shortly after their births. Their mothers put them in a linen basket which is then dropped down into the river. The birth of Moses has also the same mythological motif of "the exposed infant" as these heroes.

The motif of the pharaoh/the king being warned through a dream is also common in the stories of Moses and Abraham (Rank). In the story of Moses, the Pharaoh dreams and sees "an old man who holds a pair of scales; all the inhabitants of Egypt are on one side, with only a suckling lamb on the other, but nevertheless, it outweighs all the Egyptians" (Rank 10). He immediately asks the scholars and astrologers for an interpretation of the dream. According to the consultants of the Pharaoh, the dream means that a newborn son of the Israelites will bring destruction to Egypt. Fearing that the dream will come true, Pharaoh decides to have all the newborn children of the Israelites killed. Similar to this motif, in Abraham's story, King Nimrod has a revelation through the stars that a newborn will end the sovereignty of kings and possess their power, which compels King Nimrod to decide to kill the child to prevent himself from being overthrown (Rank 12).

Another resemblance is between the birth stories of Perseus and Gilgamesh. In Perseus's story, Acrisius, the king of Argos, wants to have a male heir to his throne, but according to the Delphian oracle, the son of Danaë, the daughter of Acrisius, will cause his death. Intending to prevent this, Acrisius keeps his daughter, Danaë, in an iron tower; however, Zeus finds a way to reach Danaë and she gets pregnant. Soon after Acrisius discovers Danaë's son, Perseus, he puts the mother and the son in a box and throws them into the sea. In Gilgamesh's account, Senechoros, the king of Babylonians, was told by the Chaldean fortunetellers that the son of his daughter would end his sovereignty. Like Acrisius, to prevent this prophecy, Senechoros keeps his daughter hidden, but she gets pregnant secretly. The newborn Gilgamesh is thrown from the acropolis, but an eagle saves him from getting injured and looks after him (Rank 17-19).

Through different birth stories of various heroes, Otto Rank reaches the conclusion that, depending on common features, construction of a standard legend around distinct hero myths is possible:

> The standard legend itself may be formulated according to the following outline:
> The hero is the child of very distinguished parents, and usually the son of a king.
> His origin is preceded by difficulties, such as sexual abstinence, prolonged infertility, or secret intercourse of the parents due to external prohibition or obstacles. During or before the pregnancy, a prophecy, in the form of a dream or oracle, warns against his birth, usually threatening harm to the father. Therefore, the newborn child, usually at the instigation of the father or his representative, is doomed to be killed or exposed. As a rule, he is surrendered to the water, in a box. He is then saved by animals, or by lowly people (herders), and suckled by a female animal or a lowly woman.

> After he has grown up, he finds his distinguished parents in a variety of ways. He takes revenge on his father, on the one hand, and is acknowledged, on the other, achieving greatness and fame. (Rank 47)

Otto Rank also mentions Theodor Benfey's original community idea which argues that there is an originating place for all myths and folk tales, and they spread to the other parts of the world; migration or borrowing theory which again pointing to an original location for myths and their acceptance by other people with the help of commerce or any other exchange medium (1-2). Rank highlights that these two theories seem to be remarkably close to each other. They both try to explain the distribution of the myths but do not elucidate their origins. Rank says, "[…] the ultimate problem is not whence and how the material reached a certain people. That question is, where did it come from to begin with" (2).

Rank points out that Adolf Bastian's elementary ideas theory provides a more justifiable explanation to the origin of myths considering general traits of the human psyche to be a reason for the unanimity of myths (5). According to Adolf Bastian's theory, the "thought" or "idea" process takes its source from the collective representations. Here the term "thought" or "idea" has a wide coverage including myths, legends, and also actions, rituals, customs – a world view in general (Köpping). The basic distinction between elementary and folk ideas is that the former is "elementary patterns of thought" where the latter is "patterns of thought of diverse ethnic groups" (Köpping 30):

> […] The collective representations in their variety are called *folk ideas*; […] the general similarity of folk ideas points to certain underlying primary principles or *elementary ideas*, which seem to be the same for all mankind and point to the validity of the notion of the *psychic unity of mankind*. (Köpping 31)

In addition to Bastian's elementary ideas concept, Carl Gustav Jung also contributes to this common psychic ground approach and establishes it as the baseline for his psycho-social theory. Jung underlines the existence of the collective unconscious, a part of the human psyche that is not acquired on a personal level, but through a form of universal heredity, and its operating components, archetypes (42). He also mentions other scholars similarly contributing to this topic:

> The concept of the archetype, which is an indispensable correlate of the idea of the collective unconscious, indicates the existence of definite forms in the psyche which seem to be present always and everywhere. Mythological research calls them "motifs"; in the psychology of primitives they correspond to Levy-Bruhl's concept of "representations collectives," and in the field of comparative religion they have been defined by Hubert and Mauss as "categories of the imagination." Adolf Bastian long ago called them "elementary" or "primordial thoughts." From these references, it should be clear enough that my idea of the archetype—literally a pre-existent form—does not stand alone but is something that is recognized and named in other fields of knowledge. (Jung 42-43)

According to Jung, the collective unconscious is not gained through a personal experience, but rather it is in the psyche of all humankind since its remotest beginnings. Therefore, the collective unconscious could be taken as the incorporation of "the entire psychic potential of humankind" (Stevens 75), consisting of "primordial images" and "mythological motifs" and manifested through myths and legends (Hauke 67):

> My thesis, then, is as follows: In addition to our immediate consciousness, which is of a thoroughly personal nature and which we believe to be the only empirical psyche (even if we tack on the personal unconscious as an appendix), there exists a second psychic

> system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents. (Jung 43)

Jung defines archetypes as "the unconscious images of the instincts themselves, in other words, that they are patterns of instinctual behavior" (44). Referring to Jung's description, Anthony Stevens, a Jungian analyst and psychiatrist, lists archetypal concepts as:

> … archetypal *events* (e.g., birth, death, separation from parents, initiation, marriage, the union of opposites, etc.), archetypal *figures* (e.g., mother, child, father, God, trickster, hero, wise old man, etc.), archetypal *symbols* (e.g., sun, moon, water, mandala, cross, fish, horse, snake, etc.) and archetypal *motifs* (e.g., the Apocalypse, the Deluge, the Creation, the night sea journey, etc.). (84)

Also, Jung argues that archetypes being common to all humanity, are innate predispositions to form images which are condensations of repeated human experiences:

> These archetypes, whose innermost nature is inaccessible to experience, are the precipitate of the psychic functioning of the whole ancestral line; the accumulated experiences of organic life in general, a million times repeated, and condensed into types. In these archetypes, therefore, all experiences are represented which have happened on this planet since primeval times. (qtd. in Shelburne 52)

When a physical event and primitive human psyche act together, original archetypal images are produced due to the interpretation of this very physical event as a psychic fantasy. What remains is not the real physical phenomena, but its psychic remnants as fantasies. The psychic imprinting transforms the physical event into an archetypal image which is the main content of the collective unconscious (Shelburne 52). Shelburne argues that "The repetition of these typical human experiences leaves a sort of function trace in the psyche which then can act to produce analogous mythological images in succeeding generations" (52).

There is another perspective that considers archetypes as story themes. Christopher Booker, the author of *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*, categorizes outlines of various stories from Gilgamesh to Cinderella and defines archetypal plots such as *overcoming the monster, rags to riches, the quest, voyage and return, comedy, tragedy,* and *rebirth*. In his book, there are many examples from ancient stories, like Perseus for overcoming the monster, Orpheus for the voyage and return; fairy tales, like Cinderella and Aladdin for rags to riches; and popular movies, like *Raiders of the Lost Ark* for the quest (Booker). Also, in his book *The Writer's Journey*, Christopher Vogler highlights the recurring patterns in stories and sees the archetypes as a "part of the universal language of storytelling" (24). According to Vogler, there are frequently occurring archetypes in stories such as *hero, mentor (wise old man or woman), threshold guardian, herald, shapeshifter, shadow, ally,* and *trickster*. Specifically speaking about the hero archetype and his/her journey, Vogler states the psychological function:

> The journey of many Heroes is the story of that separation from the family or tribe, equivalent to a child's sense of separation from the mother. The Hero archetype represents the ego's search for identity and wholeness. In the process of becoming complete, integrated human beings, we are all Heroes facing internal guardians, monsters, and helpers. In the quest to explore our own minds we find teachers, guides, demons, gods, mates, servants, scapegoats, masters,

> seducers, betrayers, and allies, as aspects of our personalities and characters in our dreams. All the villains, tricksters, lovers, friends, and foes of the Hero can be found inside ourselves. The psychological task we all face is to integrate these separate parts into one complete, balanced entity. The ego, the Hero thinking she is separate from all these parts of herself, must incorporate them to become the Self. (29-30)

Vogler also highlights the dramatic function of the hero archetype as providing an entrance into the story by creating an identification with the hero. Growth and action are two other main dramatic functions of the hero archetype in the sense that the hero learns from various sources like from a mentor, a lover, or a villain, and grows, and also with his/her acts, the hero can also move the story forward (Vogler 30-31).

Many other archetypes appear in myths, fairy tales, or screenplays. One of the frequently occurring archetypes is the mentor archetype which is often associated with teaching and protecting the heroes. King Arthur's guide Merlin, or Cinderella's Fairy Godmother are common examples of the mentor archetype. The main dramatic function of the mentor is training the hero, but there is also a gift-giving function: Perseus is given winged sandals, a magic sword, and a mirror by Athena to behead Medusa, or Luke Skywalker is given his father's lightsaber by Obi-Wan Kenobi. The gift "may be a magic weapon, an important key or clue, some magical medicine or food, or a life-saving piece of advice" (Vogler 40).

The shadow archetype is mainly associated with repressed energy coming from the dark side. Villains, enemies are embodiments of the shadow archetype which creates a challenge for the hero and forces the hero to overcome a situation, that is usually life-threatening, by unlocking the inner potential of the hero (Vogler). The shadow archetype can also appear as other archetypes such as fatal shapeshifters (e.g. Femmes fatales), functioning as a trickster or even mentor:

> A Shadow may also wear the masks of other archetypes. Anthony Hopkins' "Hannibal the Cannibal" character from *The Silence of the Lambs* is primarily a Shadow, a projection of the dark side of human nature, but he also functions as a helpful Mentor to Jodie Foster's FBI agent, providing her with information that helps her catch another insane killer. (Vogler 67)

The trickster archetype is also a common figure occurring in stories to symbolize mischief. The other dramatic function of the trickster archetype, which may be assigned to the comical sidekick of the hero, is providing comic relief in a dramatic situation/ plot. Also, there are many folktales and fairy tales which include the trickster hero as a witty rabbit overcoming its dangerous enemies like wolves or hunters, and the modern embodiment of the trickster hero as a rabbit is Bugs Bunny, the renowned animation character of Warner Brothers (Vogler 78). Another famous trickster hero is Loki from Norse mythology:

> The Tricksters of mythology provide many examples of the workings of this archetype. One of the most colorful is Loki, the Norse god of trickery and deceit. A true Trickster, he serves the other gods as legal counselor and advisor, but also plots their destruction, undermining the status quo. He is fiery in nature, and his darting, elusive energy helps heat up the petrified, frozen energy of the gods, moving them to action and change. He also provides much-needed comic relief in the generally dark Norse myths. Loki is sometimes a comical sidekick character in stories featuring the gods Odin or Thor as heroes. In other stories he is a hero of sorts, a Trickster Hero who survives by his wits against physically stronger gods or giants. At last he turns into a deadly adversary or Shadow, leading the hosts of the dead in a final war against the gods. (Vogler 78)

To sum up, the collective unconscious, a form of universal heredity, affects the unanimity in certain details and their reappearances in most mythological tales through the archetypes. Each archetype has both dramatic and psychological functions, from giving motion to the story to symbolizing confrontation with parental figures. The hero archetype provides the audience with an entrance into the story by creating an identification with the hero whereas the mentor is often associated with teaching and protecting the heroes. The shadow may be seen as a figure related more to the dark side but the hero can unlock his/her potential by only surviving through the challenges the shadow brings about.

1.2. NOT AN INVENTION BUT AN OBSERVATION

After this overview of recurring themes and frequently repeating archetypal symbols and characters in mythological narratives, fairy tales, or modern storytelling media such as movies, cartoons, etc., it will be easier to understand the monomyth. The structure of the hero's journey is constructed on this universal outline. Joseph Campbell states the main stages of the monomyth, the hero's journey, as "*separation—initiation—return*":

> A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (28)

According to Campbell, death and resurrection are two universal concepts that are immanent to life and occur every time when there is a passage to go through. To become an adult, one must give up childhood, which means this very person must die as a child and be reborn as an adult. In order to reach a more comprehensive understanding of this concept of passage or transition from one state to another, we may recapitulate that when each stage in life comes to a close and

the nature of events require the hero to cross a threshold to continue his/her journey, there awaits a certain "rite of passage" to be fulfilled.

The concept of "rites of passage" was first structured by Arnold Van Gennep, a Dutch-French-German ethnographer, in his book *Les Rites de Passage (The Rites of Passage)*, originally published in France in 1909. Later, the term is used in many fields such as cultural anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies. Joseph Campbell also used the foundational aspects of "rites of passage" while establishing a universal outline for the concept in literary theory, the hero's journey. Broadly speaking, Arnold Van Gennep makes an analogy that a society has similar features to a house having divisions like rooms and corridors, and between these deliberately separated sections or rooms, the passage is only made available through formalities and ceremonies (Gennep 26). He argues that the individual's life consists of several passages from one to another and these rites of passages have three stages as *preliminal – liminal – post-liminal* rites (Gennep 11). According to Van Gennep, preliminal rites are the rites of separation from a previous world, whereas liminal (or threshold) rites are for the transitional stage where the individual leaves his/her previous role behind but is not yet assigned to a new one. Finally, post-liminal rites are incorporative ceremonies for the integration of the individual into society, but with his/her new role. He posits a more structural analysis by asserting that the essential significance of rites remains while details change:

> Their [rites] positions may vary, depending on whether the occasion is birth or death, initiation or marriage, but the differences lie only in matters of detail. The underlying arrangement is always the same. Beneath a multiplicity of forms, either consciously expressed or merely implied, a typical pattern always recurs: the pattern of the rites of passage. (Gennep 191)

Van Gennep covers various rituals and ceremonies, underlining their categorical differences, rites of separation, or rites of incorporation, according to their significant functions. There are several chapters devoted to different stages of life such as birth, childhood, betrothal, marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, and funerals. For instance, rites of pregnancy have more to do with the liminal phase where rites following childbirth are more of incorporation or reintegration of the woman into her new role as a mother (Gennep 41). Moreover, he emphasizes the function of initiation rites serving as a rite of separation by cutting the cord of childhood, asexual world, and introducing a new world, a new group of people:

> Cutting off the foreskin is exactly equivalent to pulling out a tooth (in Australia, etc.), to cutting off the little finger above the last joint (in South Africa), to cutting off the ear lobe or perforating the ear lobe or the septum, or to tattooing, scarifying, or cutting the hair in a particular fashion. The mutilated individual is removed from the common mass of humanity by a rite of separation (this is the idea behind cutting, piercing, etc.) which automatically incorporates him into a defined group; since the operation leaves ineradicable traces, the incorporation is permanent. The Jewish circumcision is in no way extraordinary: it is clearly a "sign of union" with a particular deity and a mark of membership in a single community of the faithful. (Gennep 71)

Van Gennep's conceptualization of rites influences Campbell in his approach to rites of passage and the hero's journey. According to Campbell, especially birth and burial ceremonies do not only have effects on the individual but also his/her social circle is subjected to change or at least being touched (9). These rites of passage will eventually help to accomplish the hero's transition, being guidelines not only for the hero but also for other members of the society with whom he is in contact:

> When we turn now, with this image in mind, to consider the numerous strange rituals that have been reported from the primitive tribes and great civilizations of the past, it becomes apparent that the purpose and actual effect of these was to conduct people across those difficult thresholds of transformation that demand a change in the patterns not only of conscious but also of unconscious life. The so-called rites of passage, which occupy such a prominent place in the life of a primitive society (ceremonials of birth, naming, puberty, marriage, burial, etc.), are distinguished by formal, and usually very severe, exercises of severance, whereby the mind is radically cut away from the attitudes, attachments, and life patterns of the stage being left behind. Then follows an interval of more or less extended retirement, during which are enacted rituals designed to introduce the life adventurer to the forms and proper feelings of his new estate, so that when, at last, the time has ripened for the return to the normal world, the initiate will be as good as reborn. (Campbell 9)

Besides the fact that the monomythic structure, namely hero's journey which follows a cyclic pattern indeed, points out a universal presence that appears to be visible in myths from various civilizations, in his book *Storytelling and Mythmaking: Images from Film and Literature*, Frank McConnell also states that the human mind is prone to think in cyclical patterns:

> The human mind, that is, tends to think in terms of cycles. But because it thinks in terms of cycles it thinks in terms of both "phases" and "versions", in terms of individual moments both as successive moments in an overall scheme of cyclic development and as alternative representations of the same elementary fact or situation varying according to varying points of view. Each basic myth is, then, both historical and atemporal, both a version of history and a vision of existence as you and I enjoy it now, at this moment:

> depending upon our mood, our desires, and our sense of what we need from the story as it is told. (11-12)

Campbell, also, remarks on the similarities of the human psyche which is, in fact, universal with its fears and hopes within different cultures, and the everlasting need to unfold the mysteries of life that in the end will lead humankind to generate its individual mythological stories on the surface yet, in fact, similar storytelling patterns to provide an explanatory answer to the natural events or abstract concepts or symbolic manifestation to the world:

> Everywhere, no matter what the sphere of interest (whether religious, political, or personal), the really creative acts are represented as those deriving from some sort of dying to the world; and what happens in the interval of the hero's nonentity, so that he comes back as one reborn, made great and filled with creative power, mankind is also unanimous in declaring. We shall have only to follow, therefore, a multitude of heroic figures through the classic stages of the universal adventure in order to see again what has always been revealed. This will help us to understand not only the meaning of those images for contemporary life, but also the singleness of the human spirit in its aspirations, powers, vicissitudes, and wisdom. (Campbell 33)

Campbell provides a more detailed outline by dividing three main stages into subsections, listed below:

The first stage, *Separation* or *Departure*:
(1) The Call to Adventure
(2) Refusal of the Call
(3) Supernatural Aid
(4) The Crossing of the First Threshold

(5) The Belly of the Whale

The second stage, *Initiation*:
(1) The Road of Trials
(2) The Meeting with the Goddess
(3) Woman as the Temptress
(4) Atonement with the Father
(5) Apotheosis
(6) The Ultimate Boon

The third stage, *Return*:
(1) Refusal of the Return
(2) The Magic Flight
(3) Rescue from Without
(4) The Crossing of the Return Threshold
(5) Master of the Two Worlds
(6) Freedom to Live

Campbell's universal outline of storytelling is inspired by myths and folktales, and in turn, it inspires content production and has a remarkable effect on the film industry. Producers and Hollywood executives have shown considerable interest in the monomyth and numerous productions use the character arc development of the hero's journey. George Lucas's *Star Wars* is known as the first work to be constructed with Campbell's outline in mind. *The Lion King*, *Harry Potter*, *The Matrix*, and *The Lord of the Rings* are also other renowned "box-office hit" examples using the hero's journey storytelling outline.

Campbell's 17 stages of the quest are narrowed down and transformed into a more practical version for film producers by Vogler. In his version, Vogler uses Campbell's theory and creates a new version of the hero's journey with 12 steps that gather several separate stages under one general stage. He also intends to

establish more connections between well-known story examples and the theoretical part of the hero's journey.

1.2.1. Separation

The Call to Adventure

According to Campbell “This first stage of the mythological journey—which we have designated the "call to adventure"—signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown” (53). The hero may participate in adventure willingly, like Theseus hearing the Minotaur story and going after it, or the hero may be pushed into the adventure by other forces, like Odysseus’ ship being dragged by winds due to Poseidon’s grudge against him for blinding Poseidon’s son Polyphemus (Campbell 53).

Before the call, the hero lives in his ordinary world where everything is more static compared to the special world in which the adventure mostly takes place. The call to adventure may be an event, coincidence, message, or accident that is going to trigger the story (Vogler 99-100).

Vogler also says “Often heroes are unaware there is anything wrong with their Ordinary World and don't see any need for change. They may be in a state of denial” (101). In *The Matrix*, Thomas A. Anderson aka Neo is in such a state when he receives cryptic messages which greatly confuses him.

Another example is *Iron Man.* The hero of the movie, Tony Stark, lives his life in an ignorant and selfish way which keeps him away from the reality of the masses and builds weapons that destroy innocent people; until the day he is kidnapped by terrorists and realizes what he has created.

Refusal of the Call

The future hero hesitates to move forward and declines the call for adventure due to an obligation, insecurity, or fear. For example, in *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo does not want to leave his hometown and he is reluctant to accept Gandalf's summons to destroy the One Ring. The hero usually experiences a sense of conflict and confusion which may lead him/her to refuse the call. Such refusal is only a temporal state which serves to remark the inner turmoil of the hero though. Either willingly, or through pure circumstance, the hero eventually takes the path which has been laid before him.

Supernatural Aid

After committing to the quest, a protective figure appears in different forms, such as an old man, a little old crone, or a fairy godmother, and presents a talisman or charm to the hero to protect himself against enemies.

This also corresponds to the dramatic function of the mentor archetype which is gift-giving to the hero (Vogler 40). In *Star Wars*, Obi-Wan Kenobi gives Luke Skywalker his father's lightsaber. Also in *Captain America: The First Avenger*'s story, Steve Rogers receives a superhuman drug that is developed by the army and tested on him. With the help of this aid, he will get superpowers and become a superhuman.

The Crossing of the First Threshold

While going forward in the quest, the hero encounters a "threshold guardian". Vogler defines "threshold guardian" as "powerful guardians at the threshold, placed to keep the unworthy from entering. They present a menacing face to the hero, but if properly understood, they can be overcome, bypassed, or even turned into allies" (49). Stepping into this threshold the hero also leaves his/her

ordinary world behind and ventures into the unknown world. The hero is tested by the threshold guardian and then he can continue his journey, like Oedipus solving the riddle asked by the Sphinx (Vogler 50).

It is common to see real physical borders such as "doors, gates, arches, bridges, deserts, canyons, walls, cliffs" to illustrate this stage in movies (Vogler 129). In *The Matrix*, by choosing the red pill, Neo wakes up from the Matrix and crosses the threshold between two worlds.

To give another example, Captain America's threshold is more about the perception of others. Since he is only used as a propaganda figure by the army, he needs to prove to others that he can undertake the responsibility to be a real hero.

The Belly of the Whale

Campbell explains this stage as "a form of self-annihilation" (84). Mythological stories of the hero being swallowed by a monster and the triumph of the hero by cutting his way out are examples to embody this concept. The Greek hero Herakles saves Hesione, the daughter of the king of Troy, from a sea monster sent by Poseidon. When Hesione is about to be sacrificed to alleviate Poseidon's anger, Herakles rescues her by diving into the monster's throat and then slashing the belly of the monster to make his way out (Campbell 84). The belly of the whale symbolizes the final separation from the ordinary world and the hero is ready to undergo a transformation. "The idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth is symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale" (Campbell 83).

1.2.2. Initiation

The Road of Trials

This is the test and ordeals stage for the hero. Campbell defines it as “a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials” (89). Campbell mentions the story of Cupid and Psyche in which Venus, the jealous mother of Cupid, assigns very difficult tasks for Psyche if she wants to see Cupid again (89). Psyche does not give up, continues her quest till the end, and fulfills each duty given by Venus.

There is usually a sharp contrast between the special world and the ordinary world. Vogler highlights the general characteristic of this new and unknown world as “[a world] dominated by a villain or Shadow who is careful to surround his world with traps, barricades, and checkpoints. It's common for heroes to fall into traps here or trip the Shadow's security alarms. How the hero deals with these traps is part of the Testing” (137).

In most Marvel movies, different trials are dependent on the path the hero is taking. Tony Stark (Iron Man) renovates his superhero suit and attacks terrorists to save people, Steve Rogers (Captain America) learns how to adapt to the present time after being under the ice for decades and keeps fighting.

The Meeting with the Goddess

In this stage, the hero meets a powerful female figure and it marks the end of the Roads of Trials. Campbell explains, “The meeting with the goddess (who is incarnate in every woman) is the final test of the talent of the hero to win the boon of love (charity: amor fati), which is life itself enjoyed as the encasement of eternity” (109). Neo meeting with the Oracle in *The Matrix* or Frodo meeting with high elf Galadriel in *The Lord of the Rings* can be given as examples.

Woman as the Temptress

The hero may be tempted and as a result, stray from his quest. Lured by physical or material pleasures, the hero may abandon his mission and the temptress is usually portrayed as a female figure. Throughout his journey, Odysseus meets Circe and Calypso with whom he stays for a while but after that, he manages to continue his journey. Campbell underlines the hero's challenge as "The seeker of the life beyond life must press beyond her, surpass the temptations of her call, and soar to the immaculate ether beyond" (112).

Atonement with the Father

The hero comes at a point in his journey where he must confront the one holding ultimate power, usually being depicted as a father or a father-like figure. The confrontation aspect of atoning with the father is a way to reconcile with the father figure. In *Star Wars*, Luke Skywalker has a showdown with Darth Vader and learns that he is his son. Campbell also mentions this stage as an abandonment process:

> The problem of the hero going to meet the father is to open his soul beyond terror to such a degree that he will be ripe to understand how the sickening and insane tragedies of this vast and ruthless cosmos are completely validated in the majesty of Being. The hero transcends life with its peculiar blind spot and for a moment rises to a glimpse of the source. He beholds the face of the father, understands—and the two are atoned. (135)

Apotheosis

The hero achieves a kind of enlightenment. With the help of this transformation, the hero reaches transcendent wisdom and perception and attains

the best version of himself/herself. Luke Skywalker's acceptance of being a Jedi and Neo's final realization that he is the One can be counted as examples. The hero doesn't simply accept fate, yet also takes part in willingly bearing the responsibility of that fate.

The Ultimate Boon

After overcoming all challenges, the hero acquires the ultimate reward for which he/she starts the quest. Before this stage, all ordeals and other steps are to prepare the hero for the goal of the journey. Tony Starks undergoes a dramatic change from a selfish playboy to a hero who dedicates his fortune to save people. He withdraws from the weapon business and uses all his skills and sources for humanity. Steve Rogers's reward is finally embracing his powers and becoming Captain America, or in *Black Panter* T'Challa's reward is becoming the King of Wakanda.

1.2.3. Return

Refusal of the Return

This is the first step of the return stage which should be completed to achieve a full cycle of the monomyth. However, sometimes the hero might be reluctant to return to his ordinary world and wants to stay where he/she achieves the ultimate boon:

> When the hero-quest has been accomplished, through penetration to the source, or through the grace of some male or female, human or animal, personification, the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy. The full round, the norm of the monomyth, requires that the hero shall now begin the labor of bringing the runes of wisdom, the Golden Fleece, or his sleeping princess, back into the

> kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds. But the responsibility has been frequently refused. Even the Buddha, after his triumph, doubted whether the message of realization could be communicated, and saints are reported to have passed away while in the supernal ecstasy. (Campbell 179)

The Magic Flight

Campbell explains this stage by marking the difference between the triumph that is also blessed by the goddess or the god and the trophy acquired despite the opposition of the forces protecting it (182). Perseus running away with Medusa's head in order not to be caught by her Gorgon-sister can be given as an example for "fleeing hero" (Campbell 187-188):

> If the hero in his triumph wins the blessing of the goddess or the god and is then explicitly commissioned to return to the world with some elixir for the restoration of society, the final stage of his adventure is supported by all the powers of his supernatural patron. On the other hand, if the trophy has been attained against the opposition of its guardian, or if the hero's wish to return to the world has been resented by the gods or demons, then the last stage of the mythological round becomes a lively, often comical, pursuit. This flight may be complicated by marvels of magical obstruction and evasion. (Campbell 182)

Rescue from Without

In this stage, the hero might need outside help to return to the ordinary world and a rescuer should appear and support him to fulfill his mission. Campbell says "The hero may have to be brought back from his supernatural adventure by

assistance from without. That is to say, the world may have to come and get him" (192). In *The Matrix*, Trinity's reviving Neo or in *The Lord of the Rings* Frodo's being saved by the eagles are examples of this stage.

The Crossing of the Return Threshold

Campbell describes this stage as a "life-affirmative threshold" (202) and explains as "The returning hero, to complete his adventure, must survive the impact of the world" (209). The hero accepts the fact that his mission is to complete his journey by retaining the wisdom of the special world and share it with other people in the ordinary world.

Master of the Two Worlds

This stage describes the balance between the material and spiritual worlds where the hero can move between the two worlds seamlessly. Campbell describes *"the master"* as follows:

> Freedom to pass back and forth across the world division, from the perspective of the apparitions of time to that of the causal deep and back—not contaminating the principles of the one with those of the other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other—is the talent of the master. (Campbell 212)

At the end of *Iron Man*, Tony Stark becomes a better person and unlocks his potential, and serves humanity through his Iron Man persona.

Freedom to Live

This is the final stage of the monomyth and the quest is completed. It is now at the hero's discretion to choose how to live. As an example, in *the Epic of*

Gilgamesh, having lost the plant of youth, Gilgamesh returns to his city Uruk and becomes a wiser king by embracing his own mortality. At the end of Marvel*'s Avengers*, all heroes go their own ways knowing that they are ready to assemble again if it is needed. Another example is *Captain Marvel*. She refuses to continue her normal life in the world and decides to leave by explaining that the universe needs her.

CHAPTER 2: HOLLYWOOD AND THE MONOMYTH

"When you say Campbell, you are talking about a distillation about all the storytelling of mankind. That is what he represents to me."
George Miller, Mad Max (1979) Director

From today's perspective, the universality of the monomyth is not limited to myths or folktales of old civilizations; film, the dominant storytelling medium of our age, also adopts the monomyth to tell its own hero's journeys. Fundamentals or high concepts of the hero's journey are dependent on the hero's leaving the ordinary world, setting out on a journey to a special, but unknown world, passing through several life-changing ordeals, and finally returning with a reward to share with other people. Other important elements that constitute the ground for the universality of the hero's journey are archaic images and experience patterns, *the archetypes*, derived from our collective repository. From storylines of particular movies, like *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings*, or *The Matrix*, it is evident that the monomyth structure is embedded, and character arcs are built accordingly.

According to Variety Intelligence Platform, U.S. media and entertainment companies spent over $120 billion on original content, including movies and TV shows, in 2019 (Bridge). This astronomic budget enables the Hollywood industry to produce hundreds of movies and scripted TV series on yearly basis, for which creative talents and tools to build working storylines become invaluable. With the aim of attracting and appealing to a mass audience, broader experience relevancy to the mainstream audience is being pursued in contrast to other artistic patterns which are reaching a niche population and are unconventional in terms of commonly shared experiences (Vogler xvii). Christopher Vogler, Hollywood development executive and screenwriter, posits his idea on reaching a wider audience as:

> A certain amount of form is necessary to reach a wide audience. […] At the other extreme are the big Hollywood studios who use conventional patterns to appeal to the broadest cross-section of the public. At the Disney studios, I saw the application of simple story principles, such as making the main character a "fish out of water," that became tests of a story's power to appeal to a mass audience. The minds guiding Disney at that time believed that there were proper questions to ask of a story and its characters: Does it have conflict? Does it have a theme? Is it about something that can be expressed as a well-known statement of folk wisdom like "Don't judge a book by its cover" or "Love conquers all"? (Vogler xvii)

Campbell being a mythologist and literary analyst, did not always grab the attention of Hollywood. But later, when his monomyth study was discovered, the hero's journey has started to carry significance for filmmakers and creative workers of the media industry. According to the BBC documentary *Hollywood Master of Myth: Joseph Campbell – the Force Behind Star Wars* (Kerr), the most iconic movies, such as *Star Wars* and *Mad Max*, are inspired by his legacy. It was George Lucas, creator of *Star Wars*, who first brought Joseph Campbell to the attention of the filmmaking industry. Intending to write a modern fairy tale in the mid-1970s, Lucas was interested in mythology and recognized it as a vast and prime source of art:

> I had become intrigued with mythology and fairytales as a form of psychological archeology where you can really understand the psychology of people lived thousands of years ago by the stories they tell. So, I was trying to pull things down to the fine common threads. I went through lots of different mythology. Ultimately, we have become friends with Joseph Campbell. (Kerr)

Star Wars is seen as one of the most renowned examples that adopted the monomyth structure and its worldwide success triggered the attention of Hollywood to Campbell's study. According to the theatrical release order, the first movie of *Star Wars Saga* is *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope* (1977). The story of Luke Skywalker starts on the desert planet called Tatooine, where he accidentally receives a call for help from Princess Leia. The help request is actually intended for Obi-Wan Kenobi, so Luke decides to find him. Obi-Wan offers Luke to train him as a Jedi and wants Luke to accompany him on his mission to help the Rebel Alliance against the evil Empire. At first, Luke is reluctant to accept Obi-Wan's offer, but eventually, he does. Passing through several challenges and ordeals, Luke fulfills his mission by saving Rebel leader Princess Leia and defeating the Galactic Empire. As a modern myth, *Star Wars Saga* underlines the monomythic storyline explicitly: The hero, Luke Skywalker, leaves his ordinary world, but not immediately after the call for adventure, rather he is hesitant at first. Having met with his mentor, Obi-Wan Kenobi, the hero crosses the first threshold and the initiation phase starts. After going through tests and defeating enemies, Luke finally returns from the adventure changed by this experience. The structure of the storyline shows foundational similarities with the hero's journey pattern which Lucas himself acknowledges as a source of inspiration.

After Campbell's study, universally held patterns of storytelling, became source material for one of the most influential movies of the twentieth century, then the hero's journey was again going to be introduced by Christopher Vogler, working as a story consultant for Walt Disney Pictures in the mid-1980s, to the top executives and decision-makers of the industry. With the help of the famous seven-page memo, created by Vogler and later named *A Practical Guide to Joseph Campbell's The Hero with a Thousand Face,* the monomyth concept started to become more influential in Hollywood.

Vogler being a Hollywood executive implemented Campbell's framework into many well-known movies such as *The Lion King*. He continued his studies on

Campbell's hero's journey along with his professional career in Hollywood, later summarized his findings on his book *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, which has again brought a comprehensive perspective to the archetypes, the hero's journey and universal form of storytelling, referring to the studies of Joseph Campbell and Carl Gustav Jung. Seeing writers' attention to these concepts and ideas, Vogler states that "Campbellian" language and terms are being used in dramas:

> Inevitably Hollywood has caught on to the usefulness of Campbell's work. […] Filmmakers like George Lucas and George Miller acknowledge their debt to Campbell and his influence can be seen in the films of Steven Spielberg, John Boorman, Francis Coppola, and others.
>
> It's little wonder that Hollywood is beginning to embrace the ideas Campbell presents in his books. For the writer, producer, director, or designer his concepts are a welcome tool kit, stocked with sturdy instruments ideal for the craft of storytelling. With these tools you can construct a story to meet almost any situation, a story that will be dramatic, entertaining, and psychologically true. With this equipment you can diagnose the problems of almost any ailing plotline and make the corrections to bring it to its peak of performance. (Vogler 3)

It is not only the worldwide proven success of *Star Wars* that reinforces the hero's journey's acceptance by Hollywood producers, scriptwriters, and mainstream audience, rather its very essence of being in harmony with universal psychic residues driven from thousands of years of human experience recurring in diverse cultures. Vogler explains this as "the hero's journey is not an invention, but an observation" (Vogler xiii). Preserving its basic elements and structure, but having infinite variations in detail depending on historical and social circumstances, the hero's journey's fundamental principles would still be applicable to storytelling

even if it was not named, as Robert McKee, a prominent story consultant and screenwriting guru whose students have won many awards from Oscar to Emmy, stated:

> What is curious about all of this, of course, is Campbell would be the first to admit that long before *Star Wars*, any number of, thousands of films, novels, even certain plays were all Campbellesque. If Campbell had never written his book or George Lucas had never brought it into the public fore, it would not matter. Because those forms are universal. People use them all the time instinctively, creatively, naturally. He made us aware of this, George Lucas made us aware of Joseph Campbell. But it would not matter. Because that was always there and always will be there. It is human, we just do these things. (Kerr)

Hollywood executives and creative minds behind the world's most iconic movies are making use of lessons learned from Campbell's hero's journey. Implementing universal schemas derived from thousands of years of human experiences into today's storytelling reinforces the potential of the story to reach a wider audience. The *Marvel Cinematic Universe* is simply the next, contemporary step in this movement.

2.1. MARVEL CINEMATIC UNIVERSE: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BOX OFFICE BEHEMOTH

"The British seem to be aware that fantasy is the great age-equalizer;
if it's good when you're twelve, it's quite likely to be just as good,
or better, when you're thirty-six."
Ursula K. Le Guin, Dreams Must Explain Themselves (1973)

There had always been superhero movies, but they were not considered solid box office hits until Marvel brought cinematic revitalization to the genre, which carries features from both science fiction and fantasy. Having completed three phases of *The Infinity Saga* in 2019, the collective name for 23 movies starting from 2008, the *Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU)* broke the all-time franchise record with $22.6 billion global revenue (IMDbPro). The final collective movie of the series, *Avengers: Endgame*, became the biggest revenue generator movie in history, by reaching $2.8 billion on global scale and overthrowing James Cameron's *Avatar*, previously holding a 10-year reign as box office champion (Rubin). *Avengers: Endgame* has become one of the most influential movies in history not only for its revenue generation but also for conversational value around its character arcs. The arc of Tony Stark (Iron Man – portrayed by Robert Downey Jr.) came to an end after several solo and *The Avengers* team-up movies. Upon Tony Stark's completing his journey, Robert Downey Jr. stated:

> For me, the end of this run with Marvel is, oh yeah, it's a complete 180. It started off with someone who is absolutely self-centered, has more money that they can ever spend, is spiritually dead, and has no idea that they are about to go through a crucible that is going to put them in a position to be of service to their community. Boom. […] That's the great Joseph Campbell mythology of it. Ultimately you go from refusing the call of being a serendipitous hero and by the end you are willing to give the ultimate sacrifice, your life despite

> your family and your groundedness and your desire to not want to do that so that that community can thrive. (Couch)

However, the fact that the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* has been delivering astonishing achievements in terms of revenue generation capacity of the franchise globally and becoming a "the greatest of all times" hit -the first-runner of the highest-grossing films- in the film industry, only two decades ago Marvel Studios were very close to financial bankruptcy. With the serious decline of comic sales starting from the early 1990s, licensing the rights of superheroes became the only solution for the company to regain its financial balance, even though the revenue stream from licensing was quite low. Due to the licensing of the rights of superheroes, two highly important pillars of Marvel, *Spider-Man*, sold to Sony Pictures for $7 million, and *the X-Men*, to 20th Century Fox, were to be out of Marvel Studios' ownership (Elias). Even though *Spider-Man* and *the X-men* gained significant box office success and revitalized the superhero movie industry, the revenue gain of Marvel Studios from licensing the movie rights of the heroes to other moviemakers was significantly less than the expected return if Marvel produced its superhero movies on its own.

With a striking paradigm shift, Marvel Studios decided to produce its own superhero movies. Having lost the most iconic heroes and being left with less famous and popular comic characters, it would not be easy for Marvel to create a new storyline that was eventually intended to attract a wider audience than the die-hard or young fans of the comic universe. As stated in *Forbes*, "Marvel started out with a plan to build a larger cinematic universe of many different heroes who all coexist together in a single shared world" (Hughes). On the other hand, Marvel still lacked the resources for a superhero movie and struggled to create a revenue stream on its own. Finally, the studio agreed on a deal with Merrill Lynch, the investment and wealth management division of Bank of America. They were going to finance Marvel for production costs around $500 million. According to *Forbes*, "Marvel had to put up the rights to all of their comic book characters as collateral, so if the

movies didn't work then Marvel would give up the cinematic rights to their superheroes as part of the payback on the loans" (Hughes).

At that stage, Marvel did not choose to use all of its heroes immediately in a team-up movie, rather a more "hero-driven" way was implemented, building the profile of individual heroes to establish a strong connection with the audience by portraying the quest of each hero with specific character details unique to that hero. It was intended that with increased familiarity for each hero, eventually, *The Avengers* team-up movie was going to have more potential to attract a wider audience. *Iron Man* (2008) and *The Incredible Hulk* (2008) were the first movies released by Marvel, and *Iron Man* became a hit more than it was expected (Hughes). Having succeeded in creating solo character movies, the studio generated a long-term plan for assembling a cinematic universe of superheroes, mapping out the movies phase by phase (Elias).

Introducing superheroes with their backstories and their very own quests has built a complex yet integrated ecosystem of heroes, where the audience witnessed the journey of each hero and formed a closer connection. It is noticeable especially in each solo character movie that the hero is following a basic pattern, which has various similarities with Joseph Campbell's monomythic journey. Beneath the surface, the movies with different superheroes are fundamentally similar in terms of the hero's journey stages and thresholds, but regarding details, each movie has unique features that we encounter the same issue in myths and folktales from different cultures. Sylvester Stallone, one of the most well-known Hollywood actors and guest-starring in the *MCU* movie *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2,* touched upon the *MCU*'s recreation of a modern myth with the help of the hero's journey roadmap and said:

> Early on in my career I became fascinated with mythology. Joseph Campbell's *Hero with a Thousand Faces,* and so on and so forth. When I started doing Rambo, [I came to understand] there's an

> evolution that takes place. Every generation has to find itself, define its own heroes, define its own mythology. And [the *MCU*] is this generation's– and maybe even the next generation's– mythology. (Brace)

Marvel started its cinematic universe with *Iron Man* and then has extended its universe with other solo character movies and team-up movies. Iron Man's character arc development embodies Marvel's narrative design approach through several movies, including three solo movies and four team-up movies, that the studio invests in continuity for character stories and interconnected plotlines with other superheroes. Over Tony Stark, from *Iron Man* (2008) to *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), what we observe is a continuing character transformation through *Iron Man* sequels and Tony Stark's appearance in other crossover movies, and in *Avengers: Endgame* the ultimate closure for Tony Stark's character arc by sacrificing himself for the good of others.

While maintaining the traditional essence of Marvel comics, the studio also dared to offer certain diversifications from existing plotlines such as eliminating "the secret identity" norm for superheroes (Boucher). According to Richard Reynolds, "the secret identity" is one of the defining features of superheroes that the hero's split personality has its particular dramatic function (14). However, Tony Stark's iconic line "I am Iron Man" changed Marvel's approach to revealing the real identities of its superheroes, and the studio continued this deliberate preference in *Thor* by not using the secret identity of Thor, Dr. Donald Blake (Boucher). In his interview with *Deadline*, Kevin Feige, President of Marvel Studios, said:

> That success inspired us to go further in the trusting ourselves to find balance of staying true to the comics and the spirit of the comics but not being afraid to adapt and evolve and to change things. It's a fine line. If you're changing something for no reason, that's one thing, but if you're changing something because you want to double-down

> on the spirit of who the character is? That's a change we'll make. Tony Stark not reading off the card and not sticking with the fixed story? Him just blurting out 'I am Iron Man?' That seems very much in keeping with who that character is. It just hadn't been done in the comics before, but it was something very much in keeping with the comics character and what he could have done. I think it did inspire us on all the movies. What I love now — 20 movies in — is how fans expect the *MCU* to change and adapt. They expect us to be inspired by the comics as opposed to being slavishly devoted to them. (Boucher)

Since the beginning of the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*, the studio has established a new form of cinematic storytelling language with its creative decisions and narrative design and achieved to attract a greater number of audiences. Marvel has preserved the essence of its comic books' storytelling elements but also altered their reappearances in Marvel's movies.

2.1.1. The Marvel Cinematic Universe Chronology

Since the release of the first *Iron Man* movie in 2008, Marvel Studios have succeeded in building a cinematic universe storyline that encompasses four phases. This interconnected storytelling enables the studio to create new standalone superhero movies and make them a part of the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*. Marvel has released twenty-three movies and completed the first three phases which are known as "*The Infinity Saga*".

Phase 1:

Iron Man (2008), *The Incredible Hulk* (2008), *Iron Man 2* (2010), *Thor* (2011), *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), *Marvel's The Avengers* (2012)

Phase 2:

Iron Man 3 (2013), *Thor: The Dark World* (2013), *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), *Ant-Man* (2015)

Phase 3:

Captain America: Civil War (2016), *Doctor Strange* (2016), *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* (2017), *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (2017), *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017), *Black Panther* (2018), *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018), *Ant-Man and the Wasp* (2018), *Captain Marvel* (2019), *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), *Spider-Man: Far From Home* (2019)

In the following pages, *Thor* (2011) and *Doctor Strange* (2016) will be analyzed by using Joseph Campbell's monomyth and each stage in the hero's journey will be evaluated in line with the character arc and storyline development in each movie.

CHAPTER 3: LOOKING AT *THOR* THROUGH THE MONOMYTH

"I never wanted the throne! I only ever wanted to be your equal!"

Loki to Thor

The Mighty Thor first appeared as a comic book character in 1962. Richard Reynolds describes the creation of Thor in the history of comics as "the first successful attempt to harness existing mythology on a large scale to construct the *mise en scéne* of a superhero" (54). Stan Lee developed the backstory of Thor as "Dr. Blake had been the Mighty Thor in disguise all the time, having been put into the body of a lame, earthbound doctor by his father Odin as a punishment for his arrogance in Asgard" (Reynolds 54). The contemporary version of Thor's story in the movie is slightly different from the origin story in that some elements like Odin's punishment are kept whereas the persona of Dr. Blake is not used in the movie.

Thor (2011) is the fourth movie in the first phase of the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*. *Iron Man* and *The Incredible Hulk* are the first two heroes of Phase I and in *Thor,* directed by the five-time Academy Award nominee Kenneth Branagh, Marvel again adopts the hero's journey outline. But the character arc of Thor has a different projection than Iron Man and Hulk. Thor, being a mighty God and the son of Odin, already possesses supernatural powers and he is a hero-like figure unlike Tony Stark (Iron Man) and Bruce Banner (Hulk) who are mere mortals at the beginning of their journeys. However, Thor's transformation is more about proving that he is worthy enough to be the king rather than acquiring new supernatural powers and becoming a superhero.

According to Northrop Frye, there are five types of fictive heroes "classified, not morally, but by the hero's power of action, which may be greater than ours, less, or roughly the same" (33). For type I hero, he says "If superior in

kind both to other men and to the environment of other men, the hero is a divine being, and the story about him will be a myth in the common sense of a story about a god" (Frye 33). In his article, *The Epic Hero and Pop Culture*, Roger B. Rollin asserts that Superman is a great example of type I. Rollin describes Superman as "like other such mythic figures, is not only perfect but is capable of donning imperfection—of voluntarily assuming a human role…" (88). By definition, Thor is also a fit for type I hero. He is "outside of our dreams of wish fulfillment, we recognize that we could not possibly be him" (Rollin 89). However, instead of creating flawless characters, Lee and Kirby are famous for their three-dimensional heroes who have a depth of characterization. So, we see this narrative design of Marvel's comics, in the movie too. Marvel depicts Thor as having a deep conflict with his father, being easily manipulated and short-tempered, unlike Superman who is more like a stoic hero.

> With X-Men and Thor, Kirby began to weave into comics the kind of complex narrative designs found in classical myth or the Old Norse Eddas, while yet upholding a stark, sharply drawn, Comics Code-sanctioned moral dualism, a Manichean tug-of-war between Good and Evil. (C. Hatfield 138)

The plot of *Thor* is about Thor's transformation from an arrogant warrior and pretentious heir to the throne to a humble and wise protector of the universe. After Thor's banishment from his home by Odin due to his violation of rules and his arrogance, his adventure on Earth starts. Through his monomythic journey encompassing most of the stages outlined by Joseph Campbell, Thor has to prove himself a worthy hero to wield the godly hammer Mjöllnir again and return to his home.

The movie starts with an exposition scene to provide background information about the war between the frost giants and Odin. Odin defeats the frost giants who have attacked humans and killed many. Defeated by Odin, the king of

the frost giants falls and their source of power, the casket of winter, is taken. Having returned to Asgard with a glorious victory, Odin and his people live in peace and harmony. In the scene where young Thor and Loki are portrayed as brothers (different from traditional Norse mythology to serve as a comparison, a sort of duality between brothers) and preached by Odin about how to be a wise king - "A wise king never seeks out war. But he must always be ready for it" - (Thor 00:07:02), it shows that they both have the will to be king and claim that they are ready for it. It is also foreshadowed that Thor's excitement for war and tendency to solve problems with physical power are common characteristics of Thor. Also, unlike Norse mythology, portraying Thor and Loki as brothers has a dramatic function of increasing the conflict in the movie. Besides Loki, Marvel used several characters from Norse mythology while creating the stories for the sequels of *Thor* (*Thor: The Dark World* (2013) and *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017)).

> Building on, though also offhandedly distorting, the patterns laid out in Norse myth, Kirby, and Lee made Thor's unpredictable half-brother Loki into a pure villain and central figure, while also spotlighting other mythic characters, both heroic (e.g., Sif, Balder, Heimdall) and villainous (e.g., Hela, goddess of death; various giants and trolls). (C. Hatfield 132)

Portraying Thor and Loki as brothers is not only specific to the movie rather it is a foundational characteristic of Marvel's comics. Charles Hatfield, a contemporary comics scholar, comments that "[…] one of the keystones of the Marvel saga was (and is) family resemblance: the fact that heroes and villains often come from common roots and boast similar or complementary powers. Kirby introduced this idea to Marvel, specifically the topos of symbolic pairings or matches between hero and villain" (128). In Campbell's monomythic structure, all previous steps prepare the hero to confront the villain at the heart of the journey and the intensity of this confrontation depends on the power of tension between the hero-villain duo. To introduce a strong conflict between the hero and the villain,

Robert Mckee, a story consultant, asserts that, “A protagonist and his story can only be as intellectually fascinating and emotionally compelling as the forces of antagonism make them” (317). Marvel achieves “symbolic symmetry” by the heroes and villains counterbalancing each other (C. Hatfield 125). Returning to *Thor*, Thor, the hero archetype, will be challenged by the shadow archetype, Loki, and have to confront his evil adversary who is his brother at the same time. Jung describes such confrontations as a must to know oneself:

> The meeting with oneself is, at first, the meeting with one's own shadow. The shadow is a tight passage, a narrow door, whose painful constriction no one is spared who goes down to the deep well. But one must learn to know oneself in order to know who one is. (Jung 21)

To have a sustainable and expanded storytelling canvas, Marvel has tapped into “continual conflicts between powerful pairings of hero and villain” (C. e. Hatfield 140). In *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017), Hela, goddess of death and the super-antagonist of the movie, is the firstborn of Odin and her backstory reveals that there is a very deep conflict between Hela and Odin. After being imprisoned for ages by Odin, Hela comes to take the throne and she thinks she deserves it and her power has no equal. The story is constructed on the revenge of Hela and Thor’s confrontation with her, but in a “family” matter context. In fact, unlike the self-contained episodic storytelling approach of many comics, Jack Kirby and Stan Lee constructed a continuity in their narrative styles through unsettled issues. Throughout *Thor’s* sequels, each movie has a cliffhanger for the next one. Even though Thor fulfills his monomythic journey in each one separately, there is a continuing character arc development for Thor throughout the three movies.

> Marvel under Kirby introduced an epic approach to the superhero genre that was “mythic” both in its scale and in its pantheonic complications. At Marvel, heroes and villains shared common

> origins and each side was defined by its constant struggle against the other. This idea has had a great impact on the structure and iconography of the genre in the years since. By establishing pantheons of rival superbeings, Kirby infused a once tapped-out genre with the potential for more complex character relationships, sustained and meaningful conflict, and spectacular narrative drawing. (C. Hatfield 138)

With a time elapse, Thor's story starts with a coronation scene where Thor (Chris Hemsworth), a would-be king of Asgardians and all the Nine Realms under Odin's rule, enters the hall with applause and praise from an enthusiastic crowd and bows in front of his king and father Odin (Anthony Hopkins). Thor, the god of thunder and storm and the hero of the movie, is explicitly depicted as pretentious and enjoying the affection of people in the opening sequence where Odin all-father observes him closely. While greeting his son, Odin reminds him of an important point about holding power, in Thor's situation having his mighty hammer, Mjöllnir: "Its power has no equal, as a weapon to destroy or as a tool to build. It is a fit companion for a king" (Thor 00:09:16).

Marvel subverts the expected storyline of the monomyth by showing "the reward" at first and it is more like the hero's journey end scene. Even though Thor is about to become the king and complete his journey as a young prince, due to his fault, he will follow a completely different path. What Marvel does differently in *Thor* from the common use of the monomyth is showing "the reward" in the beginning but then withdrawing it until the hero proves himself. It will be seen that Thor's use of this power will change throughout his journey, from destroying to saving Asgard. In the following analysis of monomyth stages, it will be manifested that Thor's journey is a quest to prove that he is worthy enough to possess the supernatural powers given to him formerly and learn how to be a wise king who protects his people no matter what, by putting his own needs aside.

The call to adventure happens on Thor's coronation day when he is about to become the king. On his coronation day, Odin asks Thor to swear to "guard the Nine Realms, preserve the peace, cast aside all selfish ambition, and pledge himself only to the good of the Realms" (Thor 00:10:07), and Thor does so with great passion, but just before the completion of the ceremony, Odin realizes that a secret attack taking place by the frost giants to take back their source of power, the casket of winter from Asgard. The frost giants are defeated by the Destroyer, a monstrous creature controlled by Odin, and everything is resettled.

Instead of responding calmly, Thor gets so angry at the frost giants' attempt to sneak in and steal the casket from the heart of the palace that he wants to march into Jotunheim immediately where the frost giants and their king Laufey, Loki's birth father, live. Loki does not know the truth about his family and has been raised as Odin's son that is different from the original myth of Loki, whose father is the giant Farbauti and mother is the giantess Laufey or Nal.

Since Thor is the heir to the throne, he is supposed to respond calmly, assess the situation, and prioritize the safety of people as a wise king would. His father expects Thor to be worthy to ascend to the throne and make decisions to keep Asgard safe rather than behaving impulsively. This is his call to be smart enough to reject such temptations and cast aside his pride to carry the mantle of the king.

Marvel's storyline has another differentiation point than the original monomyth structure. Usually, the call to adventure is explicitly stated and then a quest takes a start. In *Thor*, Marvel uses a passive call or a call "not to act" immediately. At this stage, rather than the monomyth, the narrative style has more resemblance with Propp's structure. In his book, *Morphology of the Folktale*, he analyzes the structural characteristics of folktales and fairy tales and defines the recurring patterns as Campbell did in his study. In the introductory stage, Propp states that "An interdiction is addressed to the hero. […] Sometimes, on the

contrary, an interdiction is evidenced in a weakened form, as a request or bit of advice" (26).

Odin, the mentor archetype whose function is to train the hero, warns Thor against his approach fit for a warrior, but not for a king, and reminds Thor that he is not the king yet. Frustrated and alone, Thor is also approached by Loki who is a witty trickster, just like he is "known as the trickster god, the mischief-maker, the father of lies and deceit, and the shape-shifter" in Norse mythology (Daly 63). Thor seems ready to be tempted by Loki and then decides to go to Jotunheim to ensure the safety of the borders of Asgard. Even though his allies try to make him reconsider his decision, Thor thinks and acts like a warrior and pursues glory to prove himself to be as good as his father Odin but takes a great deal of risk. Thor's decision to defy Odin and go to Jotunheim is **the refusal of the call** which is being worthy to become king.

Although Thor legitimizes his action from his point of view, he rejects to solve the problem by weighing the alternative responses like a true king would do, continues his irresponsible action, and contradicts with his promise to "guard the Nine Realms, preserve the peace, cast aside all selfish ambition, and pledge himself only to the good of the Realms" (Thor 00:10:07). In his book *The Writer's Journey*, Vogler also talks about the violation of limits set by the mentor or the threshold guardians at the refusal of the call stage:

> Heroes inevitably violate limits set by Mentors or Threshold Guardians, due to what we might call the Law of the Secret Door. When Belle in Beauty and the Beast is told she has the run of the Beast's household, except for one door which she must never enter, we know that she will be compelled at some point to open that secret door. If Pandora is told she must not open the box, she won't rest until she's had a peek inside. If Psyche is told she must never look upon her lover Cupid, she will surely find a way to lay eyes on him.

> These stories are symbols of human curiosity, the powerful drive to know all the hidden things, all the secrets. (112)

When a hero refuses the call, he/she continues his/her ordinary life, in other words, he/she "stays" as is. Thor's refusal of the advice "stay calm" is leading him to act, which is not in line with the regular structure of the monomyth. Marvel uses a different trick to move the story forward. Like Vogler stated, this is what Propp calls "violation of the interdiction" (27). Even though Loki is introduced earlier in the movie, here with his tricky manipulation, Loki takes on his role as a villain at this stage.

> At this point, a new personage, who can be termed the villain, enters the tale. His role is to disturb the peace of a happy family, to cause some form of misfortune, damage, or harm. The villain(s) may be a dragon, a devil, bandits, a witch, or a stepmother, etc. Thus, a villain has entered the scene. He has come on foot, sneaked up, or flown down, etc., and begins to act. (Propp 27)

Looking from the monomyth perspective, we may also assert that Marvel changes the order of the temptation in the storyline. Woman as the temptress stage generally happens in the middle of the initiation but in the movie, there is not such a scene. Temptation occurs earlier in the initiation phase when Loki manipulates Thor to attack Jotunheim. Marvel changes the dramatic function of temptation from being a lure to abandon the mission in the initiation stage to a factor that moves the story forward in the separation stage.

With **the supernatural aid** of Heimdall, known as "the Watchman of the Gods" (Daly 46) and the guardian of the Rainbow Bridge Bifrost in Nordic mythology, Thor and his allies go to Jotunheim, and this action starts a war between Jotunheim and Asgard. The second supernatural aid comes from Odin who saves Thor and his friend from being killed by the frost giants in Jotunheim:

ODIN. Laufey, end this now.
LAUFEY. Your boy sought this out.
ODIN. You're right. And these are the actions of a boy, treat them as such. You and I can end this here and now before there's further bloodshed.
LAUFEY. We are beyond diplomacy now, Allfather. He'll get what he came for. War and death.
ODIN. So be it. (Thor 00:26:37)

After returning from Jotunheim, Odin insists that Thor should accept his mistake and understand the consequences of his action. However, Thor does not consider his action as a mistake, but accuses his father Odin of not being brave enough:

ODIN. Do you realize what you've done? What you've started?
THOR. I was protecting my home.
ODIN. You cannot even protect your friends! How can you hope to protect a kingdom?
THOR. There won't be a kingdom to protect if you're afraid to act. The Jotuns must learn to fear me, just as they once feared you.
ODIN. That's pride and vanity talking, not leadership. You've forgotten everything I taught you about a warrior's patience. (Thor 00:27:33)

Since Thor has defied Odin and brought war to Asgard by his arrogance and stupidity, his father Odin casts Thor out and takes his power from him and says, “You're unworthy of your title!” (Thor 00:28:55). This scene depicts the stage of **the crossing of the first threshold** where the hero leaves his/her ordinary world behind and ventures into the unknown world. In this stage, usually, the hero leaves his ordinary world at his/her will but in the movie, Thor is forced to leave by his father and lands on Earth, somewhere close to New Mexico. The exile of Thor

through the portal from Asgard to Earth is a common depiction of such crossing scenes as Marvel also uses. The actual kick-off of Thor's journey happens out of his control. Even though he causes his own exile by defying Odin, Marvel depicts Thor, not as a "willing hero", which is mostly the feature of the ordinary hero in the monomyth, but rather fully convinced that he acts like a king and does not need to learn anything about being a ruler.

Thor's banishment from Asgard could also be considered as the continuation of his training by his mentor and father Odin. Frigga, Thor's mother underlines this while talking with Loki: "There's always a purpose to everything your father does" (Thor 00:52:57). Vogler mentions the relationship between the mentor archetype and the image of the parent in terms of psychological function (40). Odin, being both father and king of Thor, represents this archetype from not only the parental side but also from being the wise old king.

This exile scene could be also interpreted differently. "The same part is played by the father alike in the Oedipus and the castration complexes—the part of a dreaded enemy to the sexual interests of childhood. The punishment which he threatens is castration, or its substitute, blinding" says Freud in *Totem and Taboo* (151). Opposing the father and disobeying his rules bring a punishment which usually associates with castration. Taking Thor's hammer means taking all his power as if amputating him and leaving him without a phallus, an instrument to subjugate. Until Thor reconciles with Odin, which means submitting to Odin's rule and accepting his mistake, he cannot have his "hammer" back. When Thor is "worthy" enough to have his powers back, he is already tamed. But this should not be considered the ending point of Thor and Odin relationship where there will be a final atonement in *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017) to be explained in the following stages.

Moreover, he crashes on Earth with an immense light burst and he is hit by a car. Just after Thor lands on Earth, his hammer crashes nearby. Before throwing

Mjöllnir to Earth, Odin puts a spell on it that "Whosoever holds this hammer if he be worthy, shall possess the power of Thor" (Thor 00:29:36).

As soon as Thor lands on Earth, there is a sharp contrast between Asgard and Earth, which is also a common feature, illustrating that this new world is unknown to the hero and that there are new rules to be learned. Campbell defines the road of trials stage as "a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials" (89). In Thor's case, Earth is the special world where he must succeed through many tests. Normally, the special world is expected to have a magical ambiance. But in the movie, Marvel defines the ordinary world as Asgard and the special world as Earth. From the audience's perspective, it is counter-intuitive to assume our daily world as a special world, but Marvel brings a shift that constitutes the fiction by subverting this axiom.

Before the road of trials takes a start, there is another stage that symbolizes the passage from the ordinary world to the special world. The belly of the whale is the final step of the separation section of the monomyth but in *Thor,* Marvel shifts it to the end of the initiation section. The belly of the whale represents the hero's willingness to change and continue his journey. Since Marvel has used an alternative narrative structure to Campbellian to initiate Thor's journey, Thor is still at the denial stage of his exile and there is not enough motivation for him to go to "the belly of the whale". Later in the movie, we will see a scene resembling this concept but merged with the apotheosis and the ultimate boon stages where the crescendo happens.

Jane Foster (Natalie Portman), an astrophysicist, and her friends Dr. Erik Selvig and Darcy Lewis take Thor to a hospital where he cannot comprehend what is going on and attacks the doctors. **The road of trials** stage starts with Jane Foster and her friends coming to rescue him from the hospital. They try to understand where he is coming from and whether he knows anything about the cosmic phenomena Jane Foster has been researching. Meanwhile, Thor's hammer is

discovered by the government agents, S.H.I.E.L.D., and Thor learns that no one has succeeded to lift it.

Thor immediately tries to reach the place protected by S.H.I.E.L.D. but fails to find a horse. He still expects the same rules as he used to experience in Asgard. In the road of trials stage, allies and sidekicks come for help, and enemies and villains emerge to defeat the hero. First of all, Jane Foster helps Thor to find the place where his hammer is kept. Thor sneaks into the place, fights with the security, and finally reaches his hammer. He is sure that as soon as he finds his hammer, he will regain his power and restore everything. Until this moment, Thor has not been realized the real meaning behind his exile. Thor, without a conscious commitment to his quest, has gone through most of the road of trials stage. The monomythic hero normally has an acknowledged mission from the beginning, but Thor's journey will have a different characteristic after he realizes what his father actually meant.

The result is a disappointment for Thor as he finds out that he can no longer lift the Mjöllnir which is to be owned by someone worthy. With a feeling of deep sorrow, Thor surrenders to S.H.I.E.L.D. agents and they put him under arrest and interrogate him. Again, the allies of Thor try to find a way to rescue him from S.H.I.E.L.D. agents. This time, Dr. Erik Selvig, Jane Foster's mentor, has a part to play and helps Thor get out.

Apart from allies, enemies and villains also appear at this stage, Vogler explains "Enemies may perform functions of other archetypes such as the Shadow, the Trickster, the Threshold Guardian, and sometimes the Herald" (138). Loki, functioning as the trickster archetype, appears to Thor and deceives him by saying that Odin is dead because of him and that Frigga forbids his return. Loki manages to outwit Thor with his carefully chosen lies and makes Thor feel guilty and alone, leaving him to bear the blame by himself.

In the drinking scene, Dr. Erik Selvig becomes a mentor-like figure and helps Thor to reflect on himself. Thor understands that he should have done everything differently and an inner change starts to take place:

> THOR. You know, I had it all backwards. I had it all wrong.
> ERIK. It's not a bad thing finding out that you don't have all the answers. You start asking the right questions.
> THOR. For the first time in my life, I have no idea what I'm supposed to do.
> ERIK. Anyone who's ever going to find his way in this world has to start by admitting he doesn't know where the hell he is. (Thor 01:06:57)

Thor's warrior friends find a way to leave Asgard by cooperating with Heimdall and land on Earth to help him. With their arrival, Thor also learns that he is deceived by his brother Loki and his father is still alive. In addition to their physical support to Thor in defeating the Destroyer later on in the storyline, which will be explained at the apotheosis stage, uncovering the truth provides Thor with emotional support.

In the movie, **the meeting with the Goddess** stage is depicted quite briefly with the clues of affection between Thor and Jane Foster. According to Campbell, the female figure not only provides unconditional love, but also has a protective power: "The mythological figure of the Universal Mother imputes to the cosmos the feminine attributes of the first, nourishing, and protecting presence" (103). Besides, Jane Foster's character, being a scientist, has another function to help Marvel to build "convergence" for science and magic as interchangeable elements in the storytelling.

> JANE. S.H.I.E.L.D., whatever they are, they're going to do everything in their power to make sure this research never sees the light of day.
> THOR. Listen to me. You must not give up. You must finish what you've started.
> JANE. Why?
> THOR. Because you're right. Your ancestors called it magic, and you call it science. Well, I come from a place where they're one and the same thing.
> JANE. What is that?
> THOR. My father explained it to me like this, that your world is one of the Nine Realms of the Cosmos, linked to each other by the branches of Yggdrasil, the Worlds Tree. (Thor 01:13:49)

Dru Jeffries, a comics scholar, comments on this scene that Thor's answer to Jane is a sort of convergence of science and magic:

> As a world-building effort, this is necessary in order to expand the physical laws of the *MCU* as established in previous entries like *Iron Man* and *The Incredible Hulk*, both of which feature scientists that become superheroes through a combination of advanced technology and medical experimentation. Magic doesn't seem to exist in that world, but the introduction of *Thor* necessitates a reconceptualization of the shared storyworld's physical laws that are inclusive of magic, or, rather, that understand magic as an advanced form of science. (Jeffries 293)

The apotheosis stage starts with Loki's sending the Destroyer, the giant metal creature, to Earth. As soon as Thor realizes what is going to happen, he immediately starts to evacuate people from the area of the battle. Even though Thor's warrior friends try to give support to Thor to defeat it, the Destroyer's power

is beyond their capability. He tells his friends to return to Asgard and save the kingdom from Loki. The whole scene is a build-up for Thor's final plan which is to sacrifice himself for the good of others. Since Thor is now ready to undertake the ordeal, he directly moves towards the Destroyer without any weapon or tool to defend himself. He tries to solve the conflict through negotiation with his brother Loki:

> THOR. Brother, whatever I have done to wrong you, whatever I have done to lead you to do this, I am truly sorry. But these people are innocent. Taking their lives will gain you nothing. So take mine and end this. (Thor 01:25:38)

Thor comes very close to death by the strike of the Destroyer. He lays down on the ground as if he is seriously injured. Parallel to Thor's scene, there is another close-up scene that shows Odin's teardrop which symbolizes reconciliation between the father and the son. This is **the atonement with the father** stage which usually comes before the apotheosis stage, in the movie they are depicted as parallel scenes. Thor achieves this through casting his vanity, pride, and "self" aside:

> For the son who has grown really to know the father, the agonies of the ordeal are readily borne; the world is no longer a vale of tears but a bliss-yielding, perpetual manifestation of the Presence. (Campbell 137)

Besides, from a broader perspective, Richard Reynolds also remarks that superheroes have usually complicated parent-child relationships and he makes a connection between the atonement with the father and the Oedipal conflict:

> More commonly, the roots of a superhero career -the all-important "origin story"- go back to adolescence, and the character's development as a superhero must encompass evolving relationships

> with parents or substitute parental figures. The most satisfying and enduring superheroes have incorporated the familiar emotional landscape of adolescence into their developing superhero mythology. Their exploits very frequently dramatize the Oedipal conflict, or what Campbell refers to as the "Atonement with the Father". (Reynolds 61)

Freud talks about the son's "wish to become like the father" (172). In his famous work, *Totem and Taboo,* he asserts that to identify with the primal father and his power, the sons devoured him. At a different layer, this could be interpreted as "internalizing" the father and the power metaphorically and becoming like him partially.

> The violent primal father had doubtless been the feared and envied model of each one of the company of brothers: and in the act of devouring him they accomplished their identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength. The totem meal, which is perhaps mankind's earliest festival, would thus be a repetition and a commemoration of this memorable and criminal deed, which was the beginning of so many things—of social organization, of moral restrictions, and of religion. (S. Freud 164-165)

In the final movie of the series, *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017), real atonement with the father occurs. After Odin's death, Hela returns to invade Asgard. Thor's hammer is broken into pieces by Hela, his wrathful sister, and he is again left without his power like in the first movie *Thor*. When he confronts his more powerful sister, he comes close to death and sees a vision of Odin. While Thor complains that he is nothing without his hammer, Odin explains why he gave the hammer to Thor. As said by Odin, the hammer is just a tool to focus Thor's power and it is not the source of his power, the source is himself, it is within him. After

this scene that helps Thor "internalize" his already existing power, but he thinks it is because of an outside object, and when he does not have it, he is powerless, Thor attacks his sister Hela. Thor loses his right eye while fighting and in the end defeats Hela. With this detail, Marvel creates a physical similarity between the father and the son that both do not have the right eye. Thor becomes the new Odin and guides his people to a new home, like a true leader.

Returning to the movie, the ordeal is a component of the apotheosis stage where the hero could die physically or experience a death-like incident that will lead him to a "death-and-rebirth" (Vogler 159). According to Vogler, this stage is also a "confrontation with an opposing force" (163) which is commonly the archetype of the shadow:

> The simple secret of the Ordeal is this: Heroes must die so that they can be reborn. The dramatic movement that audiences enjoy more than any other is death and rebirth. In some way in every story, heroes face death or something like it: their greatest fears, the failure of an enterprise, the end of a relationship, the death of an old personality. Most of the time, they magically survive this death and are literally or symbolically reborn to reap the consequences of having cheated death. They have passed the main test of being a hero. (155)

While the Destroyer is about to leave Earth, **the ultimate boon** stage starts. This phase is the point where the hero is going to reach the reward of his quest. Throughout his journey, all previous stages are to prepare the hero for this one. The scene depicts that Thor has completed his metamorphosis and is now worthy to take Mjöllnir back. The cinematography of the scene resembles the mythological story of Herakles rescuing Hesione by diving into the monster's throat, that is what Campbell uses as an example while explaining "the belly of the whale stage". He is bestowed with his supernatural powers again, defeats the Destroyer, and ready to

turn back to save Asgard. Even though it seems relatively small to take Jane Foster's research equipment back from S.H.I.E.L.D agents comparative to Asgard's problem, Thor does not forget about the others' needs anymore and helps as much as he can.

Marvel skips two stages from the classic template which are refusal of the return and rescue from without in the return phase. Thor does not start his journey as a "willing hero", but in the end, he does not hesitate to return. Since the triumph on Earth is acquired despite the opposition of the forces, Thor and his warrior friends need help to return to Asgard. Heimdall, the watchman and the protector of the Bifrost, first saves himself from the dangerous situation that he is in and then lets Thor and his friends come back to Asgard by the Bifrost. This scene corresponds to **the magic flight** stage of the monomyth.

After **crossing of the return threshold**, Thor is now ready to prevent Loki from destroying the kingdom with the help of his spiritual resurrection, that is the wisdom that Thor has gained on his quest.

> LOKI. You can't stop it. The Bifrost will build until it rips Jotunheim apart.
> THOR. Why have you done this?
> LOKI. To prove to Father that I am the worthy son. When he wakes, I will have saved his life. I will have destroyed that race of monsters. And I will be the true heir to the throne!
> THOR. You can't kill an entire race!
> LOKI. Why not? And what is this newfound love for the Frost Giants? You could have killed them all with your bare hands.
> THOR. I've changed.
> LOKI. So, have I. Now fight me. I never wanted the throne! I only ever wanted to be your equal.
> THOR. I will not fight you, Brother!

> LOKI. Come on. What happened to you on Earth that turned you so soft? (Thor 01:35:18)

Thor immediately finds the solution of destroying the Bifrost bridge to put a stop to what Loki has started by canalizing the whole power of the Bifrost to demolish the entire Jotunheim. Having stopped Loki's plan and prevented Jotunheim from being destroyed, Thor becomes **the master of the two worlds** which is a state of achieving the balance between the material and spiritual world. Thor applies what he has learned throughout his quest and his transformed self manifests himself with his actions. He conducts this heroic deed even though he will not be able to see his love Jane again without the Bifrost bridge.

In addition to this, looking through Loki's eyes may add a different perspective too. Loki's journey can also be considered a failed hero's journey. His sly actions to reach his goal in order to be approved by his father Odin and to be proclaimed as Odin's successor are not rightful in the sense that he strays to the dark side. Vogler says "Villains are heroes of their own stories" (165) and they are not necessarily pure evil without a rational:

> […] while some villains or Shadows exult in being bad, many don't think of themselves as evil at all. In their own minds they are right, the heroes of their own stories. A dark moment for the hero is a bright one for a Shadow. The arcs of their stories are mirror images: When the hero is up, the villain is down. It depends on point of view. (165)

Freedom to live, the final stage of the monomyth, is the ending scene of the journey. Having saved the kingdom and cast his vanity and arrogance aside, Thor has proved that he is worthy to be king:

> ODIN. You'll be a wise king.

> THOR. There will never be a wiser king than you. Or a better father. I have much to learn. I know that now. Someday, perhaps, I shall make you proud.
> ODIN. You've already made me proud. (Thor 01:43:32)

To put it briefly, the outline of *Thor* fulfills many steps in the monomyth. However, it does not follow every step of the monomyth in order. More importantly, in the separation phase, the journey triggering elements and how they are used by Marvel is closer to Propp's structure than the monomyth. Marvel aims to introduce Thor as a superhero and connect his story to the larger universe in this movie. While introducing the hero, following an outline that is derived from thousands of years of storytelling practice brings an intuitive closeness and natural acceptance to the journey that Thor has been through. Besides, instead of showing Thor as a flawless and stoic hero-god, Marvel reveals that even though Thor is a mighty god, he has inner conflicts and a complicated relationship with his father that the audience could relate to. This is also a distinctive characteristic of Lee and Kirby's superheroes who have the depth of characterization. Marvel's hero and villain pairing i.e. Thor and Loki are depicted as brothers, also contributes to the sense of familiarity that it is not just a power struggle between a superhero and his super-antagonist, but at another level, it is a sibling conflict or envy and fight for the affection of the father.

CHAPTER 4: LOOKING AT *DOCTOR STRANGE* THROUGH THE MONOMYTH

"We never lose our demons, Mordo. We only learn to live above them."

The Ancient One

"Doctor Strange is incredibly arrogant, brilliant, sort of extra-ordinary and his need to control fate, to control the destiny, and in particular death, has brought him to the height of his profession as a neurosurgeon," (Cumberbatch) said British actor Benedict Cumberbatch when he was describing Dr. Stephen Strange, the character portrayed by him in *Doctor Strange* (2016) directed by Scott Derrickson.

Doctor Strange appears in the third phase of the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* which has 23 movies released since the first *Iron Man* movie in 2008. Previously, there were many solo superhero movies such as *Iron Man* (2008), *Thor* (2011), *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), *Ant-Man* (2015) produced by Marvel Studios based on Marvel Comics characters and *Doctor Strange* is another link in the chain of the *MCU* in 2016.

Doctor Strange depicts a life-changing journey where the hero (Doctor Stephen Strange) undertakes a transformation from an arrogant but brilliant neurosurgeon to the Sorcerer Supreme who devotes himself to the protection of the world. Scott Derrickson, the director of the movie, explains the journey of Doctor Strange from his perspective:

> [*Doctor Strange* is] about a guy who thinks he has everything and suffered incredible pain and loss and he goes through a gauntlet of struggle and trauma. We get to see a character move from selfishness to selflessness; to go from being a total materialistic asshole to being a master of the mystic arts. I wanted to make a mind-trip action

> movie about one man overcoming himself. I wrote that text on the cover of my script to remind myself every day when I'm shooting, that was what I was making. (Singer)

According to Northrop Frye, there are degrees of the hero. Doctor Strange begins his journey as a normal human being. Unlike Thor, Doctor Strange's hero type changes throughout his journey. Since Stephen Strange is depicted as one of the best doctors in his area and has a high reputation, the movie clearly states that his capacity is greater than an ordinary person. Thus, he can be seen close to type III hero: "If superior in degree to other men but not to his natural environment, the hero is a leader. He has authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than ours, but what he does is subject both to social criticism and to the order of nature" (Frye 34). At the end of his monomythic journey, together with his character, his hero type will also change from type III to type II by a level up: "If superior in degree to other men and to his environment, the hero is the typical hero of romance, whose actions are marvelous but who is himself identified as a human being" (Frye 33). Roger B. Rollin also highlights that the hero of type II can get "a semi-divine aura even though he is of earthly mold" (88) due to suspension of natural laws.

At the beginning of the movie, Doctor Strange's preparation for surgery is depicted and his ordinary world is revealed. He is a very famous and brilliant neurosurgeon, but his overinflated ego and selfish behavior portray an overly arrogant character. The character arc of Doctor Strange starts at a point where he thinks that everything is about him and the world revolves around him. In the first sequences of his ordinary life, the camera focuses on his hands and expensive watches foreshadowing that these two will play an important role while the journey continues. His ordinary life, which mostly consists of success, wealth, and arrogance, is interrupted by a car accident that causes severe nerve damage in his hands. His perfect world collapses and he chases after every medical and scientific possibility for healing, but none of them succeeds in the way that he expects.

One day, his physiotherapist tells Doctor Strange that there is a case in which full recovery is achieved. The physiotherapist, who delivers a piece of life-changing information to Doctor Strange, is a portrayal of the herald archetype which is associated with the Greek God Hermes in mythology (Vogler 56). Vogler states that the dramatic function of the heralds is to "provide motivation, offer the hero a challenge, and get the story rolling" (56):

> Typically, in the opening phase of a story, heroes have "gotten by" somehow. They have handled an imbalanced life through a series of defenses or coping mechanisms. Then all at once, some new energy enters the story that makes it impossible for the hero to simply get by any longer. A new person, condition, or information shifts the hero's balance, and nothing will ever be the same. A decision must be made, action taken, the conflict faced. A Call to Adventure has been delivered, often by a character who manifests the archetype of the Herald. (55-56)

At this stage, having lost his career as a neurosurgeon, Doctor Strange's only aim is to find his own way back and he immediately reaches out to that man who has recovered from an untreatable spinal cord injury. Doctor Strange learns about a place called Kamar Taj where he can find healing for his hands. **The call to adventure** stage starts with Doctor Strange's discovery of the possibility of recovery in Kamar Taj. With his last penny, Strange flies to Katmandu and tries to find Kamar Taj by asking anyone he meets. Mordo, one of the masters in Kamar Taj, helps him to find the way to the sanctuary. In his book *Hand of Fire: The Comics Art of Jack Kirby*, Charles Hatfield argues that depicting a villain as an inverted hero is a narrative element Marvel comics used. At the beginning of the movie, Mordo begins his journey as a semi-mentor to Doctor Strange and strongly believes in the code of conduct that he has learned from his master, the Ancient One. However, at the end of the movie, he quits his path of being guarding sorcerer because he loses his faith in the purity of the sorcerers' mission. What Marvel

reveals in the post-credit scene is that Mordo chooses the other side which will eventually make him come across Doctor Strange.

> JONATHAN PANGBORN. Can I help you?
> BARON MORDO. They carried you into Kamar-Taj on a stretcher. Look at you now, Pangborn.
> JONATHAN PANGBORN. Mordo. So, what can I do for you, man?
> BARON MORDO. I've been away for many months now and I've had a revelation. The true purpose of a sorcerer is to twist things out of their proper shape. Stealing power. Perverting nature. Like you.
> JONATHAN PANGBORN. I've stolen nothing. This is my power. Mine.
> BARON MORDO. Power has a purpose.
> JONATHAN PANGBORN. Why are you doing this?
> BARON MORDO. Because I see, at long last, what's wrong with the world. Too many sorcerers. (Doctor Strange 01:48:50)

Mordo believes that he restores the order which was broken by the Ancient One drawing power from the Dark Dimension, but this also turns him into "an inverted hero":

> Nemeses were everything. Numerous Marvel comics in Kirby's wake pursued the idea of the villain as inverted hero, as rival and opposite. The Hulk clashed with other radiation-induced monstrosities, the Abomination and the Leader; Iron Man battled a rival armored character, the Titanium Man; and Dr. Strange faced off against rival sorcerer Baron Mordo, who shared his origins. (C. Hatfield 129)

Also, there is an alteration of the monomyth compared to *Thor*. Even though Stephen Strange's adventure starts with a loss, an accident destroying his ordinary

world, he actively sets out on a journey. In Doctor Strange's story, Marvel makes good use of upturning character flaws into the creation of a superhero. The trigger of Stephen Strange's journey to Katmandu is the possibility that he can heal his hands and turn back to his old life in which he is quite happy with his self-centered way. Even though he saves lives as a doctor, Marvel depicts his motivation as if he is doing everything for his overinflated ego and his fear of failure. Thus, instead of having a "noble" motivation such as saving the country, rescuing the innocent, Stephen Strange chases a more individualistic gain at the beginning. Marvel uses a different start from the monomythic narration, but his initial purpose will change throughout his journey.

At the sanctuary, Doctor Strange meets The Ancient One who is the Sorcerer Supreme and an embodiment of the mentor archetype which provides "motivation, inspiration, guidance, training, and gifts for the journey" (Vogler 47). The real call happens when Doctor Strange and The Ancient One discuss healing. Doctor Strange is still in pursuit of medical and scientific -material- answers whereas The Ancient One offers another possibility that is quite alien to Doctor Strange. She explains her technic as "I know how to reorient the spirit to better heal the body" (Doctor Strange 00:25:43) and expects Doctor Strange to grasp the meaning behind it or at least be respectful. However, Doctor Strange does not have faith in spiritual subjects and expresses his frustration in a scornful manner.

> DOCTOR STRANGE. You're showing me an MRI scan? I cannot believe this.
> THE ANCIENT ONE. Each of those maps was drawn up by someone who could see in part, but not the whole.
> DOCTOR STRANGE. I spent my last dollar getting here on a one-way ticket, and you're talking to me about healing through belief?
> THE ANCIENT ONE. You're a man who's looking at the world through a keyhole, and you spent your whole life trying to widen

> that keyhole. To see more, know more. And now, on hearing that it can be widened in ways you can't imagine, you reject the possibility?
> DOCTOR STRANGE. No, I reject it because I do not believe in fairy tales about chakras, or energy, or the power of belief. There is no such thing as spirit! We are made of matter, and nothing more. We're just another tiny, momentary speck within an indifferent universe.
> THE ANCIENT ONE. You think too little of yourself. (Doctor Strange 00:26:17)

Regarding The Ancient One, there is also a creative decision by Marvel to change the character's depiction. In comic books, The Ancient One is portrayed as an Asian wise man. In the movie, it is shown that there have been many Ancient Ones through time and Swinton's Ancient One is one of the embodiments. Recently, Variety published a piece of news saying "Kevin Feige admits Marvel shouldn't have whitewashed Tilda Swinton's '*Doctor Strange*' character" (Moreau). In the movie, The Ancient One is a Celtic women sorcerer and in the past, Marvel's first thought was this was an attempt to escape from the cliché of the old wise Asian man. On the other side, director Scott Derrickson and writer Jon Spaihts defended their choice as "casting a woman in the role of a man was already a diversity choice" (Yee).

The refusal of the call happens in this scene where Doctor Strange rejects the offer to widen his perception with the help of The Ancient One and belittles mystical and spiritual elements of the universe. Throughout his life, material thinking, and concrete scientific understanding have shaped his perception, and now he resists very strongly towards any other possibility which might alter his life. The Ancient One gives him a **supernatural aid** that "opens his eyes" (Doctor Strange 00:27:48) to see other dimensions of the universe and makes him experience mysteries that lie beyond the reach of his senses. Having seen the truth that "This universe is only one of an infinite number" (Doctor Strange 00:29:07),

Doctor Strange changes his mind and wants to learn the mystic arts. This supernatural aid is not only for Doctor Strange but also for the *MCU* to "recast and diversify their existing line-up, without provoking the wrath of their audience" (Hughes). Marvel gives a signal of the future direction of their storytelling by introducing the possibility of the multiverse which will be explicitly mentioned in *Avengers: Endgame* and *Spider-Man: Far From Home*.

The Ancient One expels Doctor Strange. However, later by the acceptance of The Ancient One, he **crosses the first threshold**, literally entering Kamar Taj through the door, where the hero expresses his commitment to the adventure: "Countless movies illustrate the border between two worlds with the crossing of physical barriers such as doors, gates, arches, bridges, deserts, canyons, walls, cliffs, oceans, or rivers" (Vogler 127).

After starting his training, Doctor Strange faces a new but difficult part of this magical world. He starts with reading books at the library and depends heavily on his intellect rather than focusing on the spiritual side. From the librarian, Wong, he also learns about Kaecilius and his followers who have stolen the rituals to call other-dimensional being that threatens the world.

Even though he tries hard and reads many books about mystic arts, he still cannot manage to succeed in the basics. Since he is obsessed with his hands and sees his injury as the main reason for his failure, The Ancient One tries to show him that it is not about his hands.

> THE ANCIENT ONE. You cannot beat a river into submission. You have to surrender to its current and use its power as your own.
> DOCTOR STRANGE. I... I control it by surrendering control? That doesn't make any sense.
> THE ANCIENT ONE. Not everything does. Not everything has to. Your intellect has taken you far in life. But it will take you no further.

> Surrender, Stephen. Surrender, Stephen, and your power will rise. Come with me. (Doctor Strange 00:39:23)

Then **the belly of the whale** stage starts with the Everest scene. Joseph Campbell defines this stage as "a form of self-annihilation" (84). The belly of the whale symbolizes the final separation from the ordinary world and the hero is ready to transform. The Ancient One takes Doctor Strange to Mount Everest through a magical gate and leaves him there. He is trapped there and if he cannot open his magical gate by following the learnings that The Ancient One has shared, he may die due to extreme cold. If he achieves this stage that is to find the way out from "the belly of the whale", it will be proof of his willingness and he will be ready to undergo a metamorphosis.

After succeeding at the belly of the whale stage, Doctor Strange changes his look and clothes which is a reflection of inner transformation. **The road of trials** starts with his ambition to learn new things. He even uses his astral form to study mystic art books while his body sleeps. Mordo also gives him martial arts training. Doctor Strange discovers advanced spells and achieves to use them but Wong and Mordo immediately stop him. They explain the ultimate aim of the sorcerers throughout the ages, which is to protect three sanctums (Hong Kong, New York, and London) that shield the world. This is the exposition scene of the real enemy from the other dimension, Dormammu, which represents the energy of the dark side, the shadow archetype. Kaecilius and his followers are also other enemies deceived by Dormammu's eternal life promise and they help this other-dimensional being to invade the world.

Like *Avengers*, *Doctor Strange* also uses the cities such as London or New York that exist in real life. This immanent familiarity helps Marvel achieve a sense of authentic reality within an "occult-superhero" (168) fiction, a term used by Sean Howe in his book *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story*.

> This might seem the be a strange description of the *MCU* which, unlike other superhero settings, takes place in a fictionalized version of the real world. Whereas Superman has his shining Metropolis and Batman broods over the iconic shadows of Gotham City, the Avengers keep their tower in the heart of Manhattan, surrounded by a skyline familiar to many members of the MCU audience. […] The similarity of the *MCU* to real life allows viewers to make immediate assumptions about the history of the narrative that buttress the general sense of authenticity they feel when experiencing these otherwise fictional stories. (Holdier 75)

Doctor Strange refuses to take part in this mystic war and emphasizes that his only aim is to heal his hands. This may be considered as another "refusal of the call" too. However, he finds himself in the London Sanctum under the threat of a sudden attack of Kaecilius and his zealots. The road of trials stage is mostly dominated by the shadow archetype. Fighting against Kaecilius and his followers to save London Sanctum ends in fail. Another feature of this stage is that the hero faces a death-like situation. In Doctor Strange's case, he has a serious injury and opens a magical gate to the hospital where he used to work. Marvel skips the meeting with the Goddess stage as The Ancient One has already a similar function as a mentor to Doctor Strange and they meet at the beginning of the story.

This London Sanctum sequence is the stage where Doctor Strange encounters Kaecilious for the first time and Kaecilious tries to confuse Strange about The Ancient One and her teachings. Kaecilious also tries to persuade Doctor Strange by stressing his "scientific" side, which reminds Doctor Strange that once he also said, "We're just another tiny, momentary speck within an indifferent universe" (Doctor Strange 00:26:55). Kaecilious also attempts to seduce him by offering eternal life if he joins Kaecilious in his war against The Ancient One. This stage is **the temptation**, but Joseph Campbell names it as "woman as the temptress" where the temptress is usually portrayed as a female figure. Marvel uses the "eternal

life" offer instead of "woman as the temptress" who is expected to offer physical or material pleasures. In Doctor Strange's case, the temptation is Kaecilious's offer versus helping The Ancient One to save the World:

> KAECILIOUS. You are a doctor? A scientist. You understand the laws of nature. All things age. All things die. In the end, our sun burns out, our universe grows cold, and perishes. But the Dark Dimension... And we can all live forever. (Doctor Strange 00:59:44)

From Kaecilious's viewpoint, what he has been trying to achieve is legitimate and has nothing to do with evil. Early in the movie, it is revealed that Kaecilious comes to the Ancient One to get healed. He is a grieving and broken guy who lost everyone he loved. He becomes a master due to his extreme talent, but his pride and grief mislead him. His only aim is to attain eternal life and thinks that this is the ultimate intent of the evolution. He is not a purely evil character in that sense, rather he has his own reasoning and code to guide his decisions under current circumstances. Marvel depicts Kaecilious as another failed hero and he is the predecessor of Doctor Strange. Like family conflicts and the villain relationship in *Thor*, Doctor Strange and Kaecilious share the same path or common roots that both are brilliant the students of The Ancient One.

After London Sanctum, Kaecilious and his followers attack New York Sanctum. Doctor Strange defends New York Sanctum from the attack but it is just a temporary solution. The Ancient One appears and offers him to become the master of New York Sanctum. But with Doctor Strange's refusal of this offer, the tension between The Ancient One and Doctor Strange start to rise, and **the atonement with the father** stage begins. This is a confrontation stage where the hero faces the authority figure who holds the ultimate power in his life. Campbell explains the atonement as "the abandonment of that self-generated double monster" (120) where the hero has to confront the authority of a parental figure to heal the wounds of the past.

The stage starts with a heated discussion between The Ancient One and Doctor Strange, but it does not resolve immediately. The conflict stems from Doctor Strange's still being self-centered:

> ANCIENT ONE. I see what I've always seen. Your overinflated ego. You want to go back to the delusion that you can control anything, even death, which no one can control. Not even the great doctor Stephen Strange. (Doctor Strange 01:11:36)

The hero should confront and resolve the conflict to continue his journey and reach the point where his old boundaries are annihilated. But this atonement scene is different from solving a conflict in a parent-child relationship. Rather, Marvel uses this scene to express the inner conflict of Doctor Strange in a condensed dialogue that reveals the truth that Doctor Strange has always failed to see: it is not about him. The scene functions as getting to know the hero more intimately and bringing the audience closer to him. The confrontation with The Ancient One continues in the following scene where she is almost dead and talking to Doctor Strange at the astral dimension:

> ANCIENT ONE. Do you wonder what I see in your future?
> DOCTOR STRANGE. No. Yes.
> ANCIENT ONE. I never saw your future. Only its possibilities. You have such a capacity for goodness. You always excelled, but not because you crave success, but because of your fear of failure.
> DOCTOR STRANGE. It's what made me a great doctor.
> THE ANCIENT ONE. It's precisely what kept you from greatness. Arrogance and fear still keep you from learning the simplest and most significant lesson of all.
> DOCTOR STRANGE. Which is?
> THE ANCIENT ONE. It's not about you.

> When you first came to me, you asked me how I was able to heal Jonathan Pangborn. I didn't. He channels dimensional energy directly into his own body. He uses magic to walk. He had a choice to return to his own life or to serve something greater than himself.
> DOCTOR STRANGE. So, I could have my hands back again? My old life?
> THE ANCIENT ONE. You could. And the world would be all the lesser for it. I've hated drawing power from the Dark Dimension. But as you well know, sometimes one must break the rules in order to serve the greater good. (Doctor Strange 01:20:22)

Having achieved transcendent wisdom and perception, Doctor Strange is now ready for the final transformation that he has been preparing for throughout the journey. He refuses to return to his old life even though he can heal his hands by using his magic, and he undertakes the responsibility to defend the world against Dormammu. This is where **the apotheosis** stage begins. Vogler defines this stage as “the death of the ego” (171):

> The hero is now fully part of the cosmos, dead to the old, limited vision of things and reborn into a new consciousness of connections. The hero facing an Ordeal has moved her center from the ego to the Self, to the more godlike part of her. There may also be a movement from Self to group as a hero accepts more responsibility than just looking out for herself. A hero risks individual life for the sake of the larger collective life and wins the right to be called "hero". (171)

The last sanctum, Hong Kong, is now under attack, and if it falls, the world will lose the last protecting shield and be invaded by the Dark Dimension. Doctor Strange has a final confrontation with Dormammu. He plans to keep Dormammu in an endless time loop by using the Eye of Agamotto and its spells. By doing so,

he will be sacrificing himself for the good of the world, and since Dormammu will be stuck in a time loop, it will not be able to attack the world.

> DOCTOR STRANGE. You and me, trapped in this moment, endlessly.
> DORMAMMU. Then you will spend eternity dying.
> DOCTOR STRANGE. Yeah. But everyone on Earth will live.
> DORMAMMU. But you will suffer.
> DOCTOR STRANGE. Pain is an old friend.
> DORMAMMU. You will never win.
> DOCTOR STRANGE. No... But I can lose. Again, and again, and again, and again, forever. And that makes you my prisoner.
> DORMAMMU. Stop! Make this stop. Set me free. (Doctor Strange 01:34:24)

Doctor Strange reaches **the ultimate boon** by defeating Dormammu. He makes Dormammu take its zealots from the world and end its assault and never come back. Doctor Strange completes his mission by his willingness to sacrifice himself. When he confronts Dormammu, he creates an endless time loop in which Dormammu kills Doctor Strange over and over again. But as soon as Dormammu realizes that it is a trap, the eternal being accepts Doctor Strange's offer and leaves the world. His sacrifice and restoring the order also bring a better understanding to Doctor Strange. Now, he **crosses the return threshold** and comes back to the world, as **the master of the two worlds**. Campbell describes these stages as a "life-affirmative threshold" (202) and says "The returning hero, to complete his adventure, must survive the impact of the world" (209).

> Insight might be of a deeper type. Heroes can sometimes experience a profound self-realization after tricking death. They see who they are and how they fit into the scheme of things. They see the ways they've been foolish or stubborn. The scales fall from their eyes and

> the illusion of their lives is replaced with clarity and truth. (Vogler 181)

Finally, Doctor Strange returns the Eye of Agamotto to Kamar Taj. He has now **the freedom to live** and choose his own path. Wong tells him that the death of The Ancient One will spread through the multiverse and the world needs a Sorcerer Supreme for its protection. So, Doctor Strange embraces his new role as the sorcerer and decides to undertake the responsibility to defend the world against the other-dimensional threats even though he can return to his old life. Campbell talks more about a completed mission in the hero's journey but from comics to the big screen, Marvel invests in not closing it entirely rather deferring it to the future. A never-completed narrative throughout the entire saga maintains continuity in its universe.

From a scientist who strictly denies any mystical phenomena to the guardian sorcerer of the world, Doctor Strange embraces a paradigm shift. Magic and science can coexist in Marvel's storytelling but usually, both are attributed separately to the individual heroes: "A good example of this is the partnership between Iron Man (science) and Thor (magic) developed over years in Marvel's *Avengers* title" (Reynolds 16). But Doctor Strange is more like an in-between situation where his scientist background first clashes with magic but then reconciles with it.

The story of *Doctor Strange* encompasses many of the stages in the monomyth and throughout the journey, Doctor Strange's character undergoes a metamorphosis from an arrogant and egocentric neurosurgeon to a selfless and wise sorcerer which completes the full cycle of the monomyth. *Doctor Strange* is another hero introduction by Marvel and the sequel movie, *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*, is expected in 2022. Marvel skips half of the return stage steps such as refusal of the return, the magic flight, rescue from without, and gives a quick but witty solution to defeat Dormammu. Revealing other threats awaiting to invade the world, after introducing its superhero, Marvel set the ground for upcoming adventure as usual. Also, at the end of the movie, the post-credit scene shows that

there will be a crossover with Doctor Strange appearing in the upcoming Thor’s movie. To develop a shared universe perception, Marvel usually leaves such baits and provokes the audience's curiosity.

Conclusion

"All of this has happened before. All of this will happen again."
Battlestar Galactica, TV Series (2004-2009)

Many myths, legends, fables, and fairy tales from different cultures have recurring motifs and a literary formula that follows a standard path: separation – initiation – return. Especially the hero myths contain a great number of resemblances and recurring motifs such as exposed infants, revelations through dreams, or fear of being defeated by the successor. Campbell names this universal storytelling outline *the monomyth* or *the hero's journey*. In this study, I have analyzed *Thor* and *Doctor Strange* from the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* to show the structural similarities between storytelling examples from a modern saga and the monomyth concept that is derived from the oldest myths and tales.

According to Campbell, the three main stages of the monomyth (separation – initiation – return) have various steps within and it should not be expected that each story is to include all steps. The hero starts his/her journey - either literal or symbolic – from the ordinary world where the call to adventure takes place. Separation from the ordinary world may be delayed due to the refusal of the call if the hero has a sense of inadequacy or fear. Sometimes with supernatural aid, the hero crosses the first threshold and the initiation stage starts with tests and trials. Throughout this stage, the hero steps into a special world where he/she has very limited knowledge and has to learn new rules quickly to survive. The hero also has to overcome a series of tests and confronts his/her enemies to reach the ultimate reward of the quest. After the initiation stage, the hero leaves the special world behind, retaining what he/she has learned from the journey or achieved as a reward. At the end of the cycle, the hero becomes the master of two worlds and completes his/her transformation.

Throughout his/her journey, the hero experiences a transformation while maintaining progression from one state to another. But passage or transition from one state to another may mostly require bringing closure to the current situation to step forward to the next one, which can be made possible through certain rites of passage. This idea of a transition between one mode of existence to another and crossing certain thresholds to complete the metamorphosis of the hero occupies a significant space in the monomyth concept. After fulfilling the necessary stages and surviving through ordeals and tests, the hero leaves his/her old "self" behind and is reborn as a new person to complete his/her journey.

Superheroes with "resemblance to legendary heroes or gods" (Reynolds 53) within their fictional universes have become immensely influential figures worldwide. From the early days of comics to more contemporary storytelling mediums such as movies or video games, the superheroes and their backstories have evolved.

> Indeed, in recent years the border between the superhero genre and other mass entertainment genres has been smudged: many contemporary icons, including high-tech spies, martial artists, detectives, vampire hunters, and adolescent wizards, seem to possess powers similar to those traditionally wielded by costumed superheroes. (Hatfield et al. xiii)

Today, DC (Time Warner) and Marvel (currently owned by Disney) are two companies controlling intellectual properties for most of the big screen franchises (Hatfield et al. xiii). Marvel has created one of the most successful franchises in film history and a legacy that is hard to be surpassed. Within the highest-grossing franchises list, the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* comes before *Star Wars, Harry Potter,* and *James Bond* franchises (Whitten). It would not be too much to say that the *MCU* has affected Hollywood and reached a monumental success through its large-scale storytelling structure.

At the heart of Marvel's success lies the creation of a shared and interconnected universe that eventually constitutes its own saga which, as Umberto Eco describes, “entails the passage of time; it is able to let characters grow, change, and perhaps even die; it is prone to a treelike branching into various narrative lines” (qtd. in Hatfield 128). Maintaining a determined continuity through a shared storytelling network is a concept that was already enjoyed by Marvel comics. It was a distinctive feature for Marvel comics’ narration style:

> Despite the many recurrent motifs and the burgeoning cast of characters in Superman comics during this period, almost every tale was self-contained. New readers could jump on with any issue. Between-issue temporality was still vague or deniable. Marvel became addicted, soap-opera-like, to continuing stories and unresolved problems. Marvel’s heroes and villains had baggage. They shared memories and carted them around, seldom forgetting. As Kirby, Stan Lee, and company chased the notion of continuity, those memories often (though not always consistently) impinged on present struggles. (C. Hatfield 127)

Marvel constructs its storytelling structure based on the method of Marvel comics, which has been enjoyed for decades. Benefitted from the legacy of Marvel comics that invested in continuity of character arcs and storylines, this shared and cross-pollinated universe concept has brought a new form of cinematic storytelling to the screen. Rather than creating a continuum in its narration style, DC focused more on the individual franchises. Even though DC has finally made a team-up movie, *Justice League*, in the movie the connection between the characters is relatively poor. Lacking a consistent plan and a cohesive narrative structure, DC could not reach its full potential even though the world’s most known superheroes, Batman and Superman, are in DC’s arsenal.

> This zigging and zagging after almost every release made it impossible for Warner to develop a coherent, consistent plan and to ensure the DC shared cinematic universe was more than a collection of divergent constantly morphing ideas and intentions. And that, then, had an enormous negative effect on how the films were received by critics, and the impression of this *DCEU* in the minds of audiences. (Hughes)

Kevin Feige, the creative mind behind the *MCU*, acknowledges the fact that the box-office behemoth did not invent the formula, but used it in a way that has transformed the industry completely. If we evaluate Marvel's success in establishing a common thread not just in a movie but on a larger cinematic universe scale, it turns out to be a new and unique form of cinematic storytelling. Before Marvel's method, the model used by the film industry was heavily relying on making individual superhero movies, and depending on the success, their sequels were made but usually constructed on not continuing but independent storylines. Even though what Marvel has revolutionized on the big screen is a familiar concept for comic readers, for a mass audience it was the first time that there is such a long-form and interconnected storytelling. Kevin Feige, the president of Marvel Studios, explains this method as "frankly [we] just give to the movie-going audience what the comic readers have had for years which is a Marvel Universe" (Feige and Hurd).

> All of our filmmakers have a vision, have a story they want to tell for those individual movies, but they are also into this idea of this collective grand universe that has been in the comics for years. So, we are not reinventing anything we are just bringing it to the screen for the first time. (Feige)

Unlike comic readers, for an average audience, it is quite hard to get into the storyline of a superhero that has been told over decades and built upon continuing stories. To revive Marvel's superhero comics, Peter Cuneo, Marvel Ceo

(1999 – 2002), assigned Bill James and Cuneo remarks on how James changed Marvel's storyline:

> He recognizes I think that it is very difficult to get new readers into the comic book industry. Because if you want to get emotionally attached to a character or a set of characters, let's say Spider-Man, you had to come in at an issue 475. So, you had 40 years of storytelling. So, Bill recognized that we had to start telling the stories of our major characters all over again from their origin, and he started a new series of comic books. (Cuneo)

Even though continuity in the storytelling is the central point of Marvel's narrative design, they restarted their comic universe from the beginning to welcome new readers, which resulted in great success. Similarly, starting each hero's story from its origin on the big screen has helped the *MCU* attract a wider audience, other than only attacking the die-hard fans. The tone of each movie is also different or has a subgenre such as comedy. *Captain America: The First Avenger* has a more tense ambiance while *Guardians of the Galaxy* is closer to comedy. One of the reasons behind this is Marvel's creative decision that young and mostly not popular talents were chosen as scriptwriters and directors coming from different backgrounds such as Peyton Reed, known for his romantic comedies, or Scott Derrickson who is famous for his horror movies, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*. For example, *Thor*'s cinematic tone has shifted towards comedy under Taika Waititi's direction in *Thor: Ragnarok.*

In his article *On Superhero Stories: The Marvel Cinematic Universe as Tolkienesque Fantasy,* A.G. Holdier talks about the success factors for the *MCU* as "the crafted authenticity and depth of the cohesive universe portrayed in these stories" (74). If we deconstruct the *MCU* into its elements, we will have phases consisting of solo character movies and team-up movies. In each phase, Marvel starts with introducing its heroes individually and establishes a connection between

the hero and the audience which is a key element to success. Since the other important ingredient of the Marvel formula is a shared continuity with all superheroes at a larger universe scale, using cliffhangers becomes a must. Marvel created a different approach using post-credit scenes, which have become immensely influential as a tool to reveal the sneak peek from upcoming movies. In the first movie of the *MCU*, *Iron Man*, we see this post-credit scene cliffhanger for the first time, and it shows us that what we have seen so far is just a piece of a larger universe.

Each phase in *The Infinity Saga* can be taken as a season with its episodes devoted to different solo characters and each episode has references to the other movies. At the end of each season or phase, there is a team-up movie where all superheroes come together. Marvel has also tried crossovers in solo character movies such as Stark mentoring young Peter Parker, Hulk in *Thor: Ragnarok*, while the saga has been expanding.

Holdier, too, highlights these two elements, successful character introduction before team-up movies and the slowly-crafted interconnected universe:

> This world-building project proceeded with two crucial character-based steps: firstly, each character was introduced into the continuity of the shared universe with their own film (or, in the case of *Iron Man*, films), thereby allowing each individual to undergo character development and to give the audience time to understand and appreciate each hero in their own way. Secondly, some characters like Director Nick Fury, Agent Phil Coulson, and Erik Selvig (not to mention Natasha Romanoff and Clint Barton who would themselves eventually join the Avengers' roster) were used to begin tying the early connecting threads of the Universe together as they each began popping up - however briefly or secretly in end-credit stingers - in

> more than one film. Combined with the crossing over of certain tokens like Thor's hammer, Mjölnir, the once-shadowy organization S.H.I.E.L.D., and the Tesseract, the foundation was laid for each of these disparate plotlines to come crashing together inside a team-up movie that, with all the build-up, was legitimately long-awaited. (83)

I agree with Holdier's point and will try to add one more layer. The real pillars of the *MCU* storytelling are its successfully created interconnected network of superheroes which in the end brings about an entire saga, a cohesive narrative, and making outstanding character introductions to create an entrance into the story. These two aspects are complementary, even though a studio can design an extended universe with well-calculated connections, without a proper introduction to each hero's world, it would be quite hard to keep the audience attached to a saga throughout years. Thus, I will argue that Campbell's monomyth has more to do with the movies individually and to ensure successful character introduction through the monomythic outline rather than constructing the interconnection between movies in the entire universe, which is mostly achieved by crossovers and common threads. The success of Marvel's formula could not be reduced to a single structure, that is the monomyth only, rather we can argue that the monomyth is one of the instruments that Marvel has utilized successfully within its movie plotlines.

According to Chris Gavaler, what Campbell's monomyth does successfully is bringing a structure to "the personal transformation" for which superhero stories are better epitomes than mythological stories.

> Viewed within the monomythic scope of each episode, the Clark of the opening scene is fundamentally different from the Clark of the ending scene. If a reader had never heard of Superman, she would see a human transform into super-being and then relinquish that soul-satisfying fulfillment in order to appear human again. Other superheroes enact the same cyclic transformations every time they

> don a costume. Though Campbell's monomyth can be applied only tentatively to the diverse array of world mythologies, it may find its most defining embodiment in the comics produced at its same cultural moment. (19)

Also, Gavaler points out that even though Campbell published his work in the late 1940s where the superhero genre and comics had already reached a certain level of popularity, he did not mention the subject in his analysis.

> Campbell's examples include Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Indian, Norse, and Inuit sources. He did not, however, relate his analysis to the hero character type most popular while he was developing his formula in the 1940s: the comic book superhero. Campbell published his study shortly after DC terminated Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, ending their ten-year contract on *Action Comics*. Superman, meanwhile, had expanded to newspapers, radio, film, and TV, producing a legion of similarly superhuman imitations. While Campbell's approach to comparative mythology is flawed by inattention to differences between disparate tales and cultures, it shares its mid-century, American context with the superhero genre and so suggests one culturally-specific explanation for the character type's popularity. What appealed to Campbell apparently appealed to other twentieth-century U.S. readers, too. (16)

Like Gavaler saying Campbell's inattention to the cultural context, Alan Dundes, an American folklorist, also highlights Campbell's amalgamating myths with folktales and legends: "Campbell does not really know what a myth is, and he does not really distinguish it from folktale and legend. […] His illustrative examples include Little Red Riding Hood and the Porcupine subtype of Star Husband, neither of which any folklorist would dream of classifying as myth" (394). Besides, Dundes

objects to Campbell's universal single myth idea. He argues that depending on the empirical facts, Campbell's examples to claim the universality are more likely to be individual cases rather than spread all over the world and he accuses Campbell of "playing fast and loose with folklore data to illustrate his so-called hero pattern" (396). On the other hand, Dundes criticizes folklorist society for not saying anything or saying little about Campbell's theories too. Even though according to Dundes's claim, Campbell's idea for the existence of folklore universals or a single universal myth is built on inadequate pieces of evidence from mythology and folklore studies' perspective, the monomyth could still provide a working frame for narratology. Campbell uses plenty of storytelling examples while arguing the presence of the monomyth in the narrative design of ancient myths and legends. However, his method to exemplify the monomyth's presence is dependent on the partial selection in the sense that he chooses specific parts of different stories for relevant steps in the monomyth. Considering all seventeen stages, the outline becomes eclectic and does not seem cohesive enough. But regarding the overall standard path: separation – initiation – return, Campbell's monomyth identifies passages successfully and gives a clear pattern to follow while analyzing storytelling examples.

In this study, the *MCU* movies *Thor* and *Doctor Strange* were selected to illustrate the monomythic structure through more contemporary examples and to understand the structural similarities between the storytelling outline of these movies and the hero's journey. Both movies are the first of their sequels and have a function to introduce the hero in his own world. It should be noted that Thor, known also as the Mighty Thor in comics, is deliberately chosen to analyze how Marvel accomplishes "to harness existing mythology on a large scale to construct the mise en scéne of a superhero" (Reynolds 54), but this time not in comics but in a movie. Doctor Strange is chosen for its clear demonstration of the character arc development and its the sharp transformation from the story of Stephen Strange to Doctor Strange as a guardian sorcerer of the world.

Although the outlines of both movies fulfill many steps of the monomyth. they do not encompass all seventeen stages of Campbell's hero's journey similar to many myths, legends, and folk tales. The plot of *Thor* is about Thor's transformation from an arrogant warrior and pretentious heir to the throne to a humble and wise protector of the universe. *Doctor Strange* depicts a life-changing journey where the hero (Doctor Stephen Strange) undertakes a transformation from an arrogant but brilliant neurosurgeon to the Sorcerer Supreme who devotes himself to the protection of the world.

Each character transforms throughout his journey, from a self-centered person to a selfless hero who can sacrifice himself for the good of other people. For different reasons, Thor and Doctor Strange do not immediately accept the call to adventure, rather they refuse it at first. Passing through ordeals and trials, they finally encounter the villain and they are ready to cast their needs aside to save humanity. In both movies, it is visible that the monomyth concept is embedded into the storytelling outline where both heroes complete their journeys and become the master of two worlds in the end.

Even though the morphology of the adventure in both movies seems generally in line with the standard path of the monomyth, how Marvel adopts it changes regarding the characteristics of the heroes. That is to say, Marvel uses the same template, but with different iterations each time. Thor's journey is more about proving himself a worthy hero to become the future king of Asgard whereas Doctor Stephen Strange undergoes a substantial metamorphosis that changes his individuality completely. Thor does not become a superhero, because he is already a superhero, but he has a lesson to learn; Doctor Strange is far from being a superhero at the beginning but becomes one at the end of his journey.

Marvel sticks more to the outline of the monomyth in *Doctor Strange*. The reason behind this could be creating a superhero from scratch - from a mere mortal to a hero with new supernatural powers. By doing so, Marvel achieves the genesis

of Doctor Strange as a superhero, and now his character arc will continue to develop for future movies. In *Thor*, we already have an established perception of Thor as a hero-god and watch his passage from an arrogant prince to a wise future king.

Behind the success of the movies and the overall popularity of the Marvel saga, it is evident that an important aim is to make good use of the monomythic structure to reach a wider audience and achieve iconic recognition worldwide. We can say that Marvel incorporates Campbell's monomyth while designing the transformation of the hero in his journey in each movie. The introduction of the hero is achieved through this journey. But this is not enough to maintain continuous cinematic storytelling through the shared universe concept. Thus, we can conclude that Campbell's monomyth has a supportive role. The monomyth functions as an outline of the central narration in each movie, but on a higher level, the interconnected storytelling method functions as the central design and requires different elements to maintain.

Marvel's adaptation of the monomyth can be seen as a successful storytelling method, but Marvel is not the only studio or moviemaker which utilizes this universal storytelling outline. Actually, in many famous box-office hits from *Rocky* to *Harry Potter*, it seems that the character development is constructed in line with Campbell's concept. The monomythic journey allows the audience to focus more on the hero's personal traits, know him better and understand his inner or outer struggles and appreciate the way he overcomes them. Robert McKee says, "The audience's emotional involvement is held by the glue of empathy" (141). The hero serves as an entrance to the story and over the hero, the audience starts to establish a closer connection. Identification with the hero requires empathy. To empathize with the protagonist, the audience needs "a certain shared humanity".

> When we identify with a protagonist and his desires in life, we are in fact rooting for our own desires in life. Through empathy, the

> vicarious linking of ourselves to a fictional human being, we test and stretch our humanity. (McKee 142)

The monomyth amplifies audience engagement and its identification with the protagonist in certain ways. First of all, in the separation stage, introducing the hero in his ordinary life and his backstory prepare a build-up setting for the audience to comprehend the hero's point of view. Hesitation to set out on a journey or refusing the call can be seen as a natural and shared human reaction to such a mission to go to the unknown world. Also, the appearance of important archetypal figures such as mentor archetype invokes resemblances for real-life counterparts of these universal images i.e. mentor archetype has a close connection with the image of parental figures. In the initiation stage, the audience witnesses each step for trials, failures, and retries. Each step of the monomyth allows the audience to track the ongoing transformation of the hero which makes the audience an overseeing party of the hero's journey. In the confrontation phase of the journey, such as atonement with the father, usually, a common parent-child relationship conflict is staged which the audience could relate to and reconciling with the father figure provides a psychological resolution. In the return stage, continuing character transformation through the monomyth is completed and a reasonable closure is given to the audience. Without a proper build-up, the audience cannot empathize with the plotline of a movie, and once it is achieved, "in that moment of recognition, the audience suddenly and instinctively wants the protagonist to achieve whatever it is that he desires" (McKee 141). The use of the monomyth in narration styles of movies constructs these build-up steps depending on the stage of the journey to form an emotional attachment with the audience and reinforces their storytelling to enjoy a more accessible tone and attract a greater number of audiences.

This study includes only two solo movies from the *MCU*, but a further investigation could look at other movies of the canon, especially the structural similarities between team-up movies at the end of each phase and the monomyth concept, or at other franchises such as DC movies. Also, there are several hints that

the *MCU* is going to become a multiverse: Doctor Strange's bringing the mystical realm and its alternative dimensions to the front, the discussion between The Ancient One and Bruce Banner about time travel and multiverse in *Avengers: Endgame*, *Spider-Man: Far From Home'*s nod to the existence of a multiverse (Ewing). This brings us to a necessity for future studies - the need to develop more comprehensive models to analyze superhero multiverses:

> One aspect of superhero fandom's specialization if not insularity is its fascination with continuity, that is, the way serial superhero comics seek to maintain the semblance of a single overarching world shared by many heroes. The eruption of a superhero "universe" into a "multiverse" of divergent timelines multiplies the potential for baroque continuity-based stories. While this issue might seem to be of only narrow fannish interest, in fact it intersects with larger issues including the pleasures of serial narrative and narratological theories about the making of "storyworlds," i.e., the mental models readers develop for understanding stories. According to cognitive narratologist Karin Kukkonen, the complexity of superhero multiverses challenges these models, and challenges narrative theory as well, calling on scholars to develop a more complex theory of how readers understand such tales. (Hatfield et al. 76)

The superheroes list from Marvel and DC, mainly consists of male characters. According to the findings of a recent research study conducted by Facciani et al. on gender representation in comic books using over twenty-three thousand characters for the analysis, the comic world has overtly loaded with male heroes: "Men represented 85% of total comic book characters". Among all human protagonists, white men have a 79% share (Facciani et al. 221). The scope of this study is limited to the analysis of the *MCU*'s storytelling method through the monomyth, but another research area regarding the superhero world could be

whether there is any difference in the monomythic structure of the characters of different gender representations in comic books and superhero movies.

Given the influence and recognition around the world, Marvel Studios can be seen as one of the foremost storytellers of the twenty-first century. Starting from the late 1930s, the scope of the superhero stories has expanded, but for these storytellers the structure of the storytelling remained the same in each quest: it is still, as it always was, the monomyth.

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